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ROME'S FOOL—
AND OTHER TALES
BY
MABEL CRONISE JONES

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ROME'S FOOL

AND OTHER TALES

By
MABEL CRONISE JONES E
Author of

"Achsah," "In Days of Old When Knights Were Bold," etc., etc.

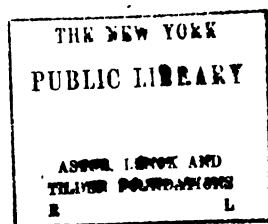


25.

BROADWAY PUBLISHING COMPANY
835 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

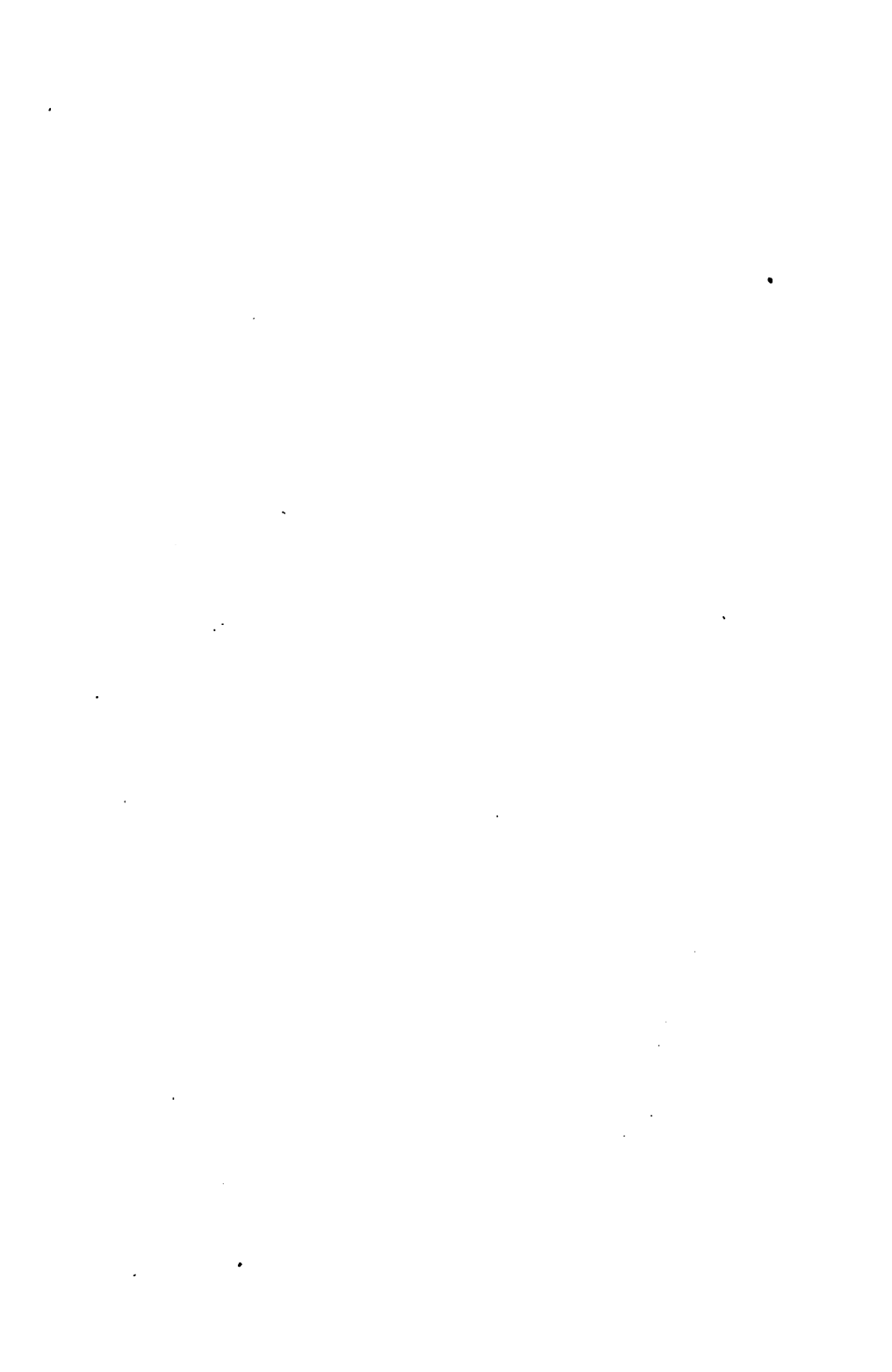
1914

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MABEL CRONISE JONES



The stories included in this volume have already appeared in various magazines and periodicals. The author wishes to thank the "Smart Set," "Uncle Remus's Magazine," and the Western Syndicate for the courtesy of republication.

ROME'S FOOL



ROME'S FOOL

Electra leaned slightly forward from her couch and caught hold of her friend's stola.

"Coruna, why do you not leave Lucius? You still look so young that no visitor in Rome can believe you to be the mother of Titus and Tiberius; and you are wonderfully beautiful. The gods cannot wish you to be tied for the rest of your life to a man who is the mock and jest of the whole city."

"Leave Lucius? I do not understand——"

"I mean, of course, for you to divorce him. The Senate will readily consent, or, for that matter, Tarquinius himself can attend to it. The Senate is only a figurehead since the death of Servius Tullius. Tarquinius likes to do everything, and as I am rather a favorite of his just now, I can manage this divorce for you——"

"Not another word on this subject, else I shall hold you no friend of mine. If my husband be in sooth the laughingstock of Rome, who made him so? It is passing strange that any of us retain our reason, seeing all of the infamous crimes which Tarquinius and that queen of his have committed. Have you forgotten how Tullia murdered——"

"This is treason. You are speaking of your husband's uncle and of the king of Rome. If some slave should repeat your words, how much would your life be worth?"

ROME'S FOOL

"It would not be worth an instant's purchase, but what care I? What reason have we to boast of our royal connection? It has only resulted in the confiscation of my husband's estate. The king feared Lucius because the people loved him. I tell you, Electra, that I hate Tarquinius with all the strength of my soul——"

"Will you be quiet?"

"Let me speak out this once. In Rome nowadays a person must smother his feelings. I have a volcano inside of me; I must bow to Tullia—do reverence to the queen who murdered her husband and her sister that she might clear the way to her marriage with Tarquinius. Oh, they are well mated!"

Electra turned pale. "Tarquinius and Tullia are now our rulers; it is the part of wisdom to forget those deeds. They hold our lives in the hollow of their hands."

"How can one forget? Until Rome ran red with the victims of Tullia—until she drove her chariot over the dead body of her father, was not my husband the leader of the Senate? Did not every one pause when he spoke and hang breathless upon his every word?"

"True, but that was long ago. You must adapt yourself to the present. You are poor, wretchedly poor, and Lucius is an idiot——"

"If we are poor, it is because Tarquinius made us so; if Lucius has lost his reason, it is because his eyes have gazed upon the deeds of your queen."

"She is your queen, too, and the slave who combs your hair may be a spy in the service of Tarquinius; I tell you to be careful, there are more plots and counterplots in Rome than you dream of."

"They cannot touch me; we have nothing left now that royalty can envy. We are safe."

"You are left—and Prince Aruns has fallen in love

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with you—you are only his cousin by marriage, the nuptials would be lawful.”

“Aruns? It is you and not my husband who is devoid of sense!”

“Do let me tell my story. Aruns is the son of Tarquinius; that family will stop at nothing to achieve its ends—you know that full well. He has made me his confidant. He has fallen violently in love with you. He is handsome and rich; he may be king of Rome one day—and I do beseech you to adapt yourself to the circumstances of the times—for your sons’ sake, if not for your own. He is determined to have you as his wife. No matter what Lucius may have been long ago, now he is but the mock of every slave and scullion in Rome; they call him “Brutus”—nothing else. Save from your lips no one now ever hears his real name. How can you be so mad as to hesitate? I——”

“I do not hesitate, make no mistake. I do not hesitate for one single instant. Were Aruns a thousand times the prince that he is, and were Lucius a thousand times the fool that you call him, I would never divorce him—never! What he is now he has been made by the house of Tarquinius, and I would starve to death or drink slow poison before I would marry one of that vile race. Aruns is——”

“Hush, I beg of you to hush!”

Electra’s quick ears had caught the sound of footsteps in the adjoining room. She grew pale with terror. What if some spy from the royal palace had been listening?

Both women sat in utter silence for a moment; then the draperies were parted. The stalwart form of Lucius Junius towered in the doorway—Lucius, known by every Roman as “Brutus.”

Electra’s eyes wandered over his figure. Not so many years ago he had been a leader; he had been high

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in the confidence and esteem of Servius Tullius; he had been a brave soldier, an eloquent speaker; the Senate as well as the populace were swayed at his will.

His devotion to his wife had been remarked by all Rome. Electra drew a deep sigh. No wonder her friend grieved for the days that had departed, but it was the height of folly to reject the offer of Aruns. One must be diplomatic and circumspect if one would live and prosper in Rome.

The eyes of Brutus, vacant and unintelligent, rested upon his wife. There was no meaning in his gaze, no comprehension of the words which he must have heard, and which, had he been himself, would have aroused him to deadly vengeance against the house of Tarquinius.

Coruna rose from her couch, passing swiftly to his side. "Are you tired, Lucius? Will you have wine and food?" then she paused, catching a glimpse in the adjoining room of her husband's distant relative—Tarquinius Collatinus.

"Pardon, Coruna, I did not mean to come upon you thus, but I am going out to my country palace to see Lucretia for a few hours, and I asked Lucius to go with me. It will do him good. I do not like to have him on the streets of Rome so much."

"Neither do I, Collatinus, but what can I do? He must have air and exercise, and tractable as he seems always, I cannot prevent him from slipping away and mixing with the plebeians. He is with them constantly. He seems to enjoy being with them; he listens to their talk, though he cannot comprehend what they say, of course."

"Of course not. I wish that you had the means to live in some country place like mine, but it needs a large revenue and an immense estate to do that. I mean to see what I can do for you both. Lucius did

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much for me in bygone days. You can trust him with me now?"

"Gladly. I am never anxious when he is with you."

"Farewell, then, but one word before we go. Bear in mind your friend's warning; be careful what you say and where you say it. There is danger everywhere. No one is safe,"

"If I must purchase safety by divorcing Lucius and by marrying the son of Tarquinius then will I welcome danger." She slipped her hand within her husband's arm.

He looked down upon her with a vacant, empty smile, patting gently the hand that rested upon his toga and muttering some words which none understood.

"What is it, my husband?"

"The birds are coming home. I saw them," he answered, with a far-off look.

Tears came to Coruna's eyes. "Oh, Lucius, Lucius, can you not hear? Can you not understand? I need a protector. I need you! My honor and my life are in jeopardy. Where are your arm and your courage? I never dreamed that I should call upon you in vain!"

"Coruna, you break my heart," Collatinus exclaimed fervently; "so far as in me lies, I will do all that a man may do for you and yours. But be advised, for the sake of Lucius as well as for your own sake—temporize, put Prince Aruns off with some excuse, but do not answer him with anger and contempt."

"What else does he merit?"

"He merits nothing else, but for the sake of Lucius, here, be careful. If you vow that you will not divorce him, Aruns will see that he is slain——"

Coruna uttered a stifled cry. "I am caught like a bird by the fowler. What can I do? What can I do?"

"Just at present be careful—commit yourself to nothing and above all do not rouse the anger of Aruns."

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Let him think that you are meditating on his proposition——”

“How will that avail me?”

“It will give me time to aid you to flee from Rome. Clusium will afford you a safe refuge——”

“And you will do this for us, Collatinus?”

“Willingly, gladly. Only for the present I implore you to dissemble and not show your true feelings to Aruns. Will you promise?”

“I—I—Yes, I promise,” she said firmly “but it is only for the sake of Lucius that I do so.”

“You have done well in promising; get your household things together, and I will contrive some plan this very night by which to remove you and all of your family from the city. I can easily make the guards at the gate drunk and as we must leave at night, I can have horses waiting outside the postern gate. Oh, we can manage it, do not fear. Come, Lucius.”

But Lucius, looking into his wife's eyes, and patting her hand, paid no heed to the summons.

“Go, Lucius,” Coruna said gently, disengaging herself, and pushing him toward Collatinus.

“The birds—the birds—they are coming,” he muttered.

“Then we'll go and meet them,” Collatinus said cheerily, “we must hasten, Lucius, or my time with Lucretia will be short. That is the worst of being a soldier. I shall be glad when this war with the Rutuli is over and I can stay at home once more. Farewell, dames,” and with a courtly bow to both the women, Collatinus withdrew, taking Lucius with him.

Coruna threw herself on a couch, burying her face in her arms.

“Coruna, are you crying? Don't, don't! I beseech you! I never know what to say when any one weeps. I never weep myself. *Cui bono?* And you—why

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everything will be all right. You can either marry a prince of Rome or else you can slip out of the city some night soon with Collatinus and seek a refuge in Clusium; they will give you a welcome there very gladly. What more do you wish?"

"What more?" Coruna sprang to her feet, speaking with a passion rare with her. "What more would I wish? I would wish that my husband were once more a man among men; a man such as he once was; would I then appeal to Collatinus or to any one else for aid? I would need no defence save the arm of Lucius. Oh, Lucretia has reason to be glad, indeed! Her husband was never so great that Tarquinius looked upon him with fear, making him view butcheries to deprive him of reason, and then robbing him of his estates—a last insult!"

"Lucretia?" Electra caught eagerly at the word, glad of a chance to turn the subject. "Yes, she and Collatinus are very deeply in love—just as much so as if their wedding day had been but last week. Lucretia is certainly proud of Collatinus and Collatinus is quite as proud of her. You heard of his wager last week?"

"I hear nothing," Coruna said wearily.

"Why all Rome is talking of it! A few days ago Titus and Sextus, the king's sons, and Collatinus obtained a short furlough and came to Rome. They dined here and as they ate they fell to talking about their wives—each one boasted of his, and at last the quarrel grew so hot that Collatinus exclaimed, 'Our horses are fresh and we are untired; our wives do not know that we are near; let us appear unexpectedly and then we can easily perceive from their different occupations which one of us has boasted with truth.' The others agreed. They went first to the homes of Sextus and Titus; their wives were entertaining guests, and were laughing and feasting——"

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"And why not?" Coruna interrupted sharply; "are they not of the royal household? What else, pray, should they have been doing?"

"Electra shrugged her shoulders. "I can tell you that their husbands were none too well pleased with such frivolity—though in sooth they take enough enjoyment themselves. After those two visits Collatinus made the princes go out to his country place, and, behold—although it was late at night, the dutiful Lucretia was sitting at her wool and spinning; around her were her maids all working busily. It was truly a most domestic and improving scene. So Collatinus won his wager. What think you of the tale? He has been so puffed up ever since that he talks of his Lucretia more than ever. Why do you look so scornful? Does not my story amuse you?"

"Hardly. What kind of a man is Collatinus to make his wife the subject of a wager? With such villains, too, as the sons of Tarquinius? I think less of Collatinus than I did before you told me this tale. How can any man make his wife the subject of a bet, I say? Lucius would never have insulted me thus."

"How queerly you look at things. All the men in Rome are praising Lucretia and envying Collatinus. No one but you thinks harshly of the wager."

"It was an insult to Lucretia, nothing else."

"There is no pleasing you to-day, so I might as well go home. I bring you an offer of marriage from the king's son—and you turn on me with anger; I tell you a story that all Rome is laughing over, and you look contemptuous. Call my slave and I will go."

"Yes, Electra, I am better alone, but do not go in anger. I have too few friends in these days to afford to lose one, and though we are so different you have always been loyal and kind, and I even think that you love me some."

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"I love you a very great deal, Coruna," her friend said impulsively, kissing Coruna warmly. "You are truly more of a goddess than a woman, but I am very mortal. There, I will go now, for I but trouble you."

After Electra's departure Coruna withdrew to her own room—her head was in a whirl, and she must think, think and plan. Truly, Rome was a dangerous place. Her brothers, the Vitelli, had been ruthlessly murdered by Tarquinius when he usurped the throne. He had feared them, for they were brave and noble. She had not a relative left to aid her in these dire straits.

Friends? All of the Senators, who had been the comrades of Lucius in the peaceful days of Servius Tullius, had been slain, too. Of all the former leaders of the state, of all the men of note and influence, not one survived save Lucius alone—and who would fear him—a fool?

Coruna's heart gave one wild throb of joy; she was glad, yes, glad that the light of reason had fled from her husband's eyes; she was doubly glad that he was but "Brutus," the mock of the children and the slaves. Had he been the Lucius of former days his life would not have been spared.

She lay for hours on her couch forgetful of the many household duties that were clamoring for her attention. Dangers had now encompassed her from all sides. Could she escape? The only feasible plan of which she could think was the one that Collatinus suggested. Was even that safe? Was it not most probable that Aruns would have her house watched, and her every movement spied upon? Would he allow her the opportunity of flight?

She could see no way clear before her. The end had come.

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She rose, heartsick and weary. She must attend to her household claims. Lucius would soon return and her boys also would be coming ere long.

A hoarse, tumultuous cry came to her ears.

She stopped, terror-stricken. What was happening in Rome? There was menace and threat in that cry! Had a new slaughter been inaugurated? The noise grew in volume and fury. Thousands and thousands were rushing toward the forum.

She went to the outer door, listening intently in agonized suspense.

She could distinguish no single word, but the mood of the people was unmistakable. The sullen, angry roar of their voices sounded like the roar of a lion that had burst from its cage and was rushing upon its keeper, ready to tear and kill and devour.

She must know what it all meant.

Stopping neither for veil nor for attendant, she flew along the narrow street, the sound of angry voices growing ever nearer and nearer as she approached the forum.

Suddenly the din was hushed. An instantaneous, utter silence succeeded the angry riotous outcries.

What did the stillness presage? It terrified Coruna even more than the wrath of the mob.

She went on more slowly, drawn to the forum by an irresistible power.

On the outskirts of the crowd she halted—a voice reached her ears. Surely, surely that was Lucius, her husband, speaking with even more than his old-time eloquence! Thousands and thousands thronged around him, pressing forward lest they lose a single word of what he said. No one spoke or even whispered! It seemed as if they hardly breathed!

She struggled forward in the surging mass striving to get nearer to the speaker.

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It could not be Lucius—but though her mind and brain told her that the thing was impossible, her eyes and her heart affirmed that it was Lucius, and no other, who was swaying that vast crowd at his will.

What had happened, what did it all mean?

A sudden movement of the people in front gave her a clearer view. She caught a glimpse of Collatinus and of Tricipitinus, the father of Lucretia. Their faces were disfigured by grief—she could hardly recognize them. Was it only a few hours ago that Collatinus left her, full of joy and mirth?

And that white figure stained with blood—lying at the feet of Lucius. It was Lucretia! She clasped her hands over her heart with a shriek.

The people around turned on her angrily. "Be still—listen to what Brutus says."

What was he saying? She had lost the first part of his speech.

"—and this is the story, Romans! I have told it to you baldly, plainly! Such a tale needs no dressing in varnished phrase. Are you Romans? or are you beasts? will you endure such things as this? Shall the son of Tarquinius violate the most sacred laws of heaven and of earth and go unpunished? You have seen the streets of Rome flow with the blood of your best men! Tarquinius has decreed their death! He has tortured, murdered, and butchered for fifteen years! How much longer will you submit——?"

"Not an hour, Brutus, not an hour!" the mob shrieked. "Tarquinius and his house shall perish! Down with the race!"

"Aye," the voice of Brutus thundered forth, "down with the race of Tarquinius and down with all kings! We are Romans! We will have no kings over us henceforth, forever, we——"

"No kings! no kings! Brutus shall be our consul—"

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Brutus and Collatinus!" the mob yelled. "To the palace! to the palace! we will burn the palace; we will extinguish the family of Tarquinius."

"You say well," rang forth the clarion tones of Brutus. "For fifteen years have I lived for this moment! For fifteen years I have lived among you—despised, ridiculed. I have aped the fool that I might escape the death which Tarquinius planned for me; I have gone among you, listened to your words, seeing the unrest and dissatisfaction that was growing up in your midst. This moment repays me for all the scorn and the contempt of those fifteen years. We will be Romans once again, not slaves to do the will of a vile master and a viler queen. By the blood of Lucretia, by her pure soul, I swear never to lay down the sword while a single member of the royal family survives. We will grandly avenge this foul wrong. Lucretia has not died in vain."

The huzzas of the people burst forth again. Brutus, tall and erect, his eyes glowing like coals, overtopped the throng.

He stood still while the cries burst forth once again. "Long live Lucius Brutus, the savior of Rome." "We will have no more kings." "Down with Tullia, down with Tarquinius, down with Sextus and Titus and Aruns. They shall die!"

The crowd, mad for blood, raging for vengeance, shrieked and yelled. Brutus stood among them, unmoved, willing that they should lash themselves to still greater fury.

His keen eyes searching the mass fell upon Coruna on the outskirts of the crowd. Her eyes caught and held his. His face changed and softened. He made a mute gesture which she caught and understood. Silently she slipped away from the tumult going to her own home. He would follow as soon as possible. She

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was glad to be alone, glad of the opportunity to think over the strange, awe-inspiring scene.

Sextus had violated the home of Collatinus even as he had violated many another home. Lucretia must have told her husband the story when he arrived and then she must have slain herself. And Brutus, her Lucius, had come to the front as the avenger of Lucretia and the saviour of Rome.

Her cheeks were dyed with a crimson flood of joy and pride. She would array herself in her poor best for him, her few scanty jewels should be put on, she would meet him regally, her king by all the laws of nature and true manhood.

It was hours later that a step sounded in the outer court and Coruna, springing swiftly to her feet, went to meet the strong, tender embrace of Lucius.

With his arms enfolding her, there seemed little to say, all was understood and comprehended save one thing.

Looking down upon her fair face he saw the shadow there.

"What is troubling you in this hour, Coruna?"

"What did I ever do that made you think me unfaithful or unworthy of trust?"

"You? Nothing. I know you to be the purest woman that ever lived. I would trust you with my life, nay, more, with my honor."

"Then why did you bar me from your confidence? If you could trust me, as you say, why did you not confide in me alone? Why did you not tell me that you were not the fool that all Rome held you to be? Would I have betrayed you? Did you fear my strength of purpose?"

"If I kept silent, carissima, it was for your sake, and not for mine. I could have trusted you with that se-

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cret as with any other secret that my life may hold, but it would have made your burden greater."

"Greater?"

"Yes, Coruna, infinitely greater. Do you not think that, during all of these years, I longed to talk with you, soul to soul, as we talked in the days of long ago? Could I have foregone the pleasure of that had it not been for your sake? You think that you have suffered from the ridicule heaped upon me during this long, long period of waiting? You would have suffered infinitely more had you known that I understood the mockery of the rabble. You would have been agonized for me each time I went upon the street, you would have been in constant fear lest Tarquinius penetrate my stratagem—you would have had no peaceful moment waking or sleeping, is it not so?"

"Yes, Lucius, it is so—but did you not make your own burden the harder? Could I not have lightened and soothed your cares? Would I have counted the cost if your gain had been in the balance?"

"Not for a moment, and for your loyalty I thank you. Through all the trials and the hazards of the years you have never wavered. From much I was powerless to shield you, but from whatever I could shield you that I would, and did, and so I bore my secret in silence."

"And Rome's Fool will be Rome's ruler, Rome's consul," Coruna said slowly, wonderingly.

"Yes, the people have willed it so, and for the sake of my country I will take up the burden of that honor, though I would fain go to some quiet country seat with you and with our boys and there live in peace and contentment. And you?"

"It is all one to me. What you wish, that will I do. You are my husband, whether you be Rome's Fool or Rome's consul."

THE WORTHINGTON ROBBERY



THE WORTHINGTON ROBBERY

Robert Ainslie was re-reading for the third time a letter that had come in the afternoon's mail. Evidently its contents disturbed him greatly. It was from an old-time-friend, a friend who had always held a warm place in his heart, and who now seemed to be in grievous trouble. It was not so much what the letter said as what it hinted that perplexed the reader. Ainslie glanced over it once more, with a perturbed expression.

"MY DEAR AINSLIE:

"I claim your promised visit *now*. I want to see you at once—in fact, I need you. The country is gorgeous in its green raiment, but I freely acknowledge that my motive in writing so urgently is a purely selfish one. Come, and bring along all of your analytical and critical faculties. You must do some detective work for me. You will wonder why I do not send for a detective. It is absolutely impossible for me to do such a thing. I think that I would sooner die than tell a stranger the story that I should be obliged to tell if I engaged his services in this matter.

"Yet I cannot let the affair rest; it will wreck my happiness and poison my entire life if I do. There is a bare possibility that I may be mistaken in my conclusions; on that chance rest all my hopes. For this reason I am sending for you. For the sake of our old friendship, drop everything and come here by the first train.

"It will not be easy to tell even you the tale that you must hear before you can understand my situation. At

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college we used to declare that you were cut out for a detective. I still think so; and surely you will not refuse to use your gifts in behalf of an old friend who appeals to you from the very depths of despair.

"Come as soon as you can possibly, but come as a casual visitor. Make no allusion to *any one* of a deeper motive for your visit than appears on the surface.

"Your friend always,

"HOWARD A. WORTHINGTON."

Ainslie was a man of prompt action. Within a few hours he had arranged with his law-partner for an absence of indefinite length, had wired Worthington to expect him that night by the late train, and with valise all packed was standing on the railway platform.

Worthington's letter puzzled him more and more. Only some weighty reason could have caused his friend to write it. He had attended Worthington's marriage in the fall. New York society had been decidedly shocked at the match, for, while Worthington was the last representative of an old and wealthy family, the bride was a poor school-teacher with no aristocratic relatives—with nothing, in short, to commend her to the exclusive set, unless it were a face strikingly unique in its beauty.

Ainslie had taken rather a fancy to the girl. She had borne herself with such ease and hauteur that the bridegroom's friends had been foiled in their attempts to patronize her. She had held her own unflinchingly, and had compelled the respect of her husband's circle of acquaintances.

While Ainslie admired her, he had never felt quite sure that he understood her. He could not determine whether love or ambition had prompted her marriage to Worthington. Certainly, Howard possessed all of the personal qualifications that generally render a man

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attractive in the eyes of women, but, while Margaret treated him with courteous deference, Ainslie could never detect any spontaneous affection in her manner.

A month before, the Worthingtons had closed their Fifth avenue home and had gone to Howard's country residence up the Hudson. Margaret had urged their early departure from the city. Ainslie, who had seen considerable of them during the winter, decided that Margaret was tired of the social warfare into which she had been plunged.

She had gained some notable triumphs and could afford to smile at those who had snubbed her at the time of her marriage, yet, though her social career had been brilliant, Ainslie felt that she cared but little for the life.

He had no clue by which to guess Worthington's trouble, and though he dimly felt that it must in some way relate to the young wife, he could form no idea as to its nature.

He reached his destination shortly before midnight and found Worthington restlessly awaiting him.

"This is more than kind of you, Robert," he said, taking Ainslie's hand in a close clasp; "I shall never forget it."

"Disburden your mind at once, then, Howard, as we go to your house, and let me know what sort of a task is before me."

Worthington groaned. "I don't see how I can tell you, after all; yet I must, and I met you to-night for that special purpose. We cannot be overheard in the car, and I suppose I can talk better in the dark than I could under a brilliant light. Come ahead—here is my machine; I came down alone."

Ainslie took his place with a cheery remark, but Worthington failed to respond, and the car had borne them some distance from the station before he

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broached the subject uppermost in his mind. Then he plunged at once *in medias res*, as if determined to get through with the affair as soon as possible.

"I was robbed of a lot of family jewelry, together with five hundred dollars in money, just five days ago," he said abruptly. "No one knows of it except the guilty person and myself, so be sure that you make no allusion to the matter. You are not supposed to know anything of it. I seldom keep any amount of money in the house, paying all my bills by cheque; but this money was paid me by some tenants too late in the afternoon to allow me to bank it. I have a private den up at the house, you know, so I put the money in a small safe that stands in the room, and thought no more of it."

He stopped, the rest of the story being evidently harder to tell. Ainslie broke in with a view to help him:

"You say this happened five days ago, Howard? That fact places me at a great disadvantage. I ought to have been on the spot at once. What changes have there been in your household since that time?"

"Not any. We have half a dozen servants, that we brought with us from the city. They have all been with us for some little time, and I imagine they are entirely trustworthy. Aside from these servants, who were all in the house on the night that the robbery occurred, there was no one present except my cousin, Roderick Huntingdon; Miss Mayhew, a friend of my wife, and Margaret and myself. These persons are all there now, and I have purposely refrained from inviting other guests in order that you might find things in exactly the same condition as they were five days ago. Both Roderick and Jean Mayhew expected to leave before this, but I prevailed on them to stay—though you might be able to work better in their absence."

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"No," Ainslie said emphatically, "I must have as nearly as possible the original setting of the affair. I fear you have lost valuable time, Howard. Now tell me how and when you discovered your loss, and why it is that the matter touches you so deeply."

Worthington did not reply at once; then he said slowly: "I wish that I *could* have made up my mind to send for you before. But I could not. I'm not getting on very fast, I fear, with my story. I put the money in the safe of which I spoke——"

"Who knew of your doing so?" Ainslie interjected.

"The whole household, I presume," Worthington returned grimly. "Roderick had gone to the city with me that day and had chanced to be present when I received the bulk of the rents. He thoughtlessly made some remark about it at the dinner-table that evening, which led me to explain that I must keep it in the house overnight. I replied hastily, before I remembered that the servants were present. You can see that every one had a chance to know about it."

"What kind of a safe have you?"

"A small one, but a very strong one. It is fastened securely to the wall of my study, and stands in a recess that is curtained off. It has a strong and peculiar lock—not a combination lock, however. I have a key to it—here it is," and Worthington pulled an antique-looking key from his pocket. Ainslee examined it as best he could by the light of the car.

"I suppose that no one else has a key?"

"Yes," Worthington replied, with palpable hesitation. "I had one made for my wife. Several times I needed to send in haste for papers that I keep there, and for convenience's sake I had an extra key made for her a week ago."

"Just a moment, Howard. Who knew of your doing so? Any of the servants?"

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"I can't tell you that. I handed it to her one day at dinner—of course, Miss Mayhew and Roderick were present; whether any of the servants were in the room or not I am unable to say. I know that several jests were made on the subject at the time. Then the whole thing dropped. On the afternoon of the robbery I put the money into the safe. The day was stormy and disagreeable, I remember. After dinner I prevailed on Margaret to go to her room and stay there for the evening, as she had one of her rare headaches.

"Roderick and Miss Mayhew went off to the music room to practice some duets that my cousin had gotten that day. I went to my study, did a little writing, then, feeling drowsy, threw myself on a lounge in the room and soon fell asleep. I woke with the feeling that some one was near me. The room was dark. I started up to light the lamp, but before I had struck a match I heard my wife's voice in the hall. Roderick had evidently met her just outside my door, and he made some remark of astonishment at seeing her. She laughed lightly and said that she was going directly to her room, and that Roderick should not tell me that she had disobeyed my instructions. I hurried to the hall, but by the time I reached there Margaret had vanished. I followed to her room and found her lying on a couch. I laughingly chided her for breaking her promise and leaving her room. She looked up in apparent astonishment, and insisted that she had not been outside her door.

"'But, dear,' I said, rather perplexed, 'I heard you talking to Roderick just now in the hall.' She denied that she had done anything of the kind or that she had left the room since entering it after dinner."

"Is she a somnambulist?" Ainslie asked.

"No," Worthington replied emphatically; "she certainly is not. Furthermore, the voice that I heard in

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the hall was not the voice of a person asleep. My wife acknowledged, too, that she had been wide awake ever since leaving the dining-room. I stayed with her a little while, more puzzled and disturbed than I wished to own. As I went back to the study I met Roderick in the hall. He stopped me with a smile. 'I am telling tales out of school, Howard,' he said, 'but your wife is promenading these halls and looking like a ghost, when she ought to be abed. I just met her.' I thanked him and went on. I don't know what impulse seized me then, but I went straight to the study and unlocked my safe. The money was gone—not a vestige or sign left of it; not only the money, but a case containing all the family diamonds. I had brought them down from the city several days before, as there were to be two or three social affairs in the neighborhood, at which I wanted Margaret to wear them. They were worth a fortune, aside from their invaluable associations. They were gone. Now, Robert, you have the full story, and you can never guess what the telling of it has been to me."

"I fail to see why you take this matter so much to heart, old fellow. Your key was safe, but probably Mrs. Worthington had lost hers, and some servant entered the study and robbed you while you lay asleep."

"No." Worthington shook his head despondently. "Some such explanation occurred to me, so I went directly to my wife's room and looked in her jewel case, where she has kept the key since I gave it to her. It was there."

"Then," Ainslie responded, "her maid could easily have removed it, robbed the safe and replaced the key again."

"Prove that, for heaven's sake, Robert, and I will bless you all my life. But if that is the case, why was Margaret so anxious to conceal her absence from the

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room and to have me think that she had been there ever since dinner? There is one thing more that I presume I should tell you, since I have resolved to be perfectly frank. Of course, I settled a liberal sum on Margaret at the time we were married. The income is hers to do with as she chooses, but the efforts she has made to hold her own in society must have used it all up. She has dressed magnificently, as you know, and I have been tremendously proud of her and of her success. It costs something, though, and several times I have tried to increase her allowance, but she wouldn't permit me. Margaret is horribly proud, in her way, and I know that she hates to have the question of money come up between us."

"I don't see the drift of all this," Ainslie remarked, as his companion paused.

"I am trying to show you that her income was all used up by the social demands upon it. It chanced that that very afternoon I had happened to go to her writing-desk. I saw a letter from her mother lying there, and read it. Margaret had just received the letter that day. I must explain that our letters are usually common property, and that I was guilty of no impropriety in reading it. The letter was in the same tenor as usual, containing the home-gossip, in which my wife naturally would be interested. At the close there was an allusion to a mortgage of one thousand dollars on the home, which must be met within a month. How it would be met, Mrs. Shelton said she could not see, as her husband's illness had consumed all of their little savings. Then she seemed to regret having said anything, and told Margaret not to worry, as they would doubtless manage some way. A letter that my wife had commenced in reply was lying on the desk, and I could not resist reading the opening lines, especially as she usually handed me her letters to read

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before mailing them. Margaret wrote affectionately, telling her mother not to be troubled about the money, for, though she did not have the amount on hand just then, she would get it within a few days. The letter broke off abruptly there. Evidently, Mrs. Worthington had been interrupted."

Ainslie turned to look at his companion as well as he might in the darkness. "Of course, you went to your wife and offered her the money, delicately enough so that she could not refuse. What seems strange to me, Howard, knowing your generosity, is that you did not at first make ample provision for your wife's family."

"I did not mention the subject at all to Margaret," Worthington replied awkwardly. "I was hurt that she had not come to me at once with the letter. Some way the confounded question of dollars and cents has always seemed a barrier between us. I saw her before dinner, but she did not mention the subject, and I felt too hurt to force her confidence. It seemed as if her love for me could not have been very deep, or she would not have hesitated to ask for what she knew would be freely given. It looks strange that her family should be in such straits, I know, but I have refrained from offering them pecuniary aid through fear of hurting Margaret's feelings."

"I don't understand such subtleties," Ainslie returned bluntly; "let us talk common sense. What did she say when you told her of the robbery?"

Worthington smothered an angry ejaculation. "Heavens! you don't suppose I could discuss that subject with her, do you? Everything proves that she took the bills and diamonds. Her need of money, her acknowledgment to her mother that she had none, but would get some, her falsehood about leaving her room—*everything* shows that she is guilty. I did not tell her, or any one, of my loss."

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"And you have been the same to her as usual in these last five days?"

"I have tried to be; I hardly suppose I have succeeded very well."

"If you are so convinced of her guilt, Howard, why did you send for me?" Ainslie inquired dryly.

"Because I must have proof, positive proof, one way or the other."

"And then?"

"Then, if she is guilty—as I suppose she is—we will not keep up the farce of married life any longer. If you can possibly prove her innocent——"

"Yes?"

"I shall want to do as Judas did—go out and hang myself for all these cursed suspicions."

"Well," Ainslie said slowly, "it will be singular if I cannot get proof of some kind inside of a week. I have some theories already, but you needn't ask me any questions, for I shall not answer them. Of course, your wife may be innocent of the robbery, but if she is—well, we must wait and see what time will develop."

Ainslie was cordially welcomed next morning by his hostess and her two guests, and he sat down to the cheery breakfast-table feeling suddenly as if the fine theories that he had spend the night weaving together were too impossible to bear the light of day. He tried to throw off the matter from his mind and to appear as usual.

"Did Worthington tell you that I had found myself suddenly played out and had resolved to quarter myself here for a while?" he asked, with a genial laugh.

"He told us last evening that he had received a dispatch from you, Mr. Ainslie, and we were most de-

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lighted to hear that you were coming," the hostess said graciously.

Ainslie looked at her critically. She was certainly more worn and pale than when she had left the city. The rest of country-life had evidently not produced the beneficial results that one might naturally expect. She looked to Ainslie like an unhappy woman—a woman with a burden on her mind.

He bowed his thanks to her speech, and replied, half-ruefully: "I fear I am spoiling a delightful quartette; four is a much more manageable number than five."

Miss Mayhew glanced up with a surprised arching of her brows.

"Surely Mr. Ainslie does not imagine that he can be superfluous?" she said, with marked suavity in her tones.

Ainslie looked annoyed. He had met Jean Mayhew constantly in society for several years, and the girl generally treated him to little sarcastic remarks on every occasion. He did not pretend to understand it. Margaret rushed to his rescue. "Jean, I fear your slumbers were not good last night. I have noticed that there is a direct relation between your night's rest and the condition of your temper. I trust that Mr. Ainslie is down here as my special attendant. When my husband goes to the city I am stranded, Mr. Ainslie," she added, turning to him; "Roderick and Jean go off on long pedestrian tours, which I am too indolent to join. Your coming is a veritable boon to me."

"Besides," Huntingdon said courteously, "you will be needed, Ainslie, to fill up the quartette again. I must be off to Europe soon. In fact, I should have gone some little time ago if Robert had not so strongly objected."

"Business or pleasure?" said Ainslie interrogatively.

"A little of both; but more, probably, of the latter

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element," Huntingdon said pleasantly. Then the talk drifted to impersonal things, and Ainslie occupied himself with an analytical examination of each person, including the butler who was waiting upon them with a vast amount of condescension in his manner.

After breakfast Ainslie contrived to find himself alone with Worthington.

"Well?" said his host, with an anxious look.

"Don't begin to ask questions, Howard. I haven't taken a fair survey of the ground yet. I want to know if you have a powerful magnifying glass in the house?"

"No."

"You are going up to the city?"

"Yes, for a few hours."

"Then bring me down a glass—a good one, remember. You needn't show it to any one, either."

With that Ainslie walked off and went in quest of his hostess. For the next few days he was her inseparable companion, trying, with all the *finesse* at his command, to win her confidence. Evidently he succeeded to a certain extent, for on the morning of the fifth day she turned to him abruptly as they were walking through the woods.

"Mr. Ainslie, I believe you are my friend. Am I right?"

"Indeed you are," he said seriously, wondering to what this was the prelude.

"I am going to ask a strange thing of you," she said slowly. "I shall not ask for your promise not to betray me, for you are a gentleman. Even if you see fit to deny my request, I know that you will not mention this matter."

"If I can serve you I shall do so, of course; you must know that," he returned earnestly. He carefully refrained, however, from giving any pledge of secrecy. His loyalty belonged, first, to Worthington. Whatever

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the wife said he must tell the husband. There was no time to waste over quibbles of honor. Too much was at stake. If Margaret were innocent, she would eventually thank him; if guilty, she deserved any fate for deceiving so noble and true-hearted a husband as Howard Worthington.

It was perfectly clear that she found it hard to frame her request. At last she said, in a low tone:

"Mr. Ainslie, I need a thousand dollars. I am out of funds now. When we were married, Mr. Worthington arranged for a certain sum to be placed in trust for me. I receive the interest semi-annually. This is merely, you know, for my own personal expenses, and the amount is certainly liberal. I should not be so poverty-stricken at this moment if it were not that I was shamefully extravagant last Winter. I expect, however," she added, with a bitter laugh, "that under the same provocation I should act again in precisely the same manner. You do not know how it hurts me to be patronized."

"I know that you are a trump," he averred, with genuine admiration. "I never was so delighted at anything as at your success last winter. You want a thousand dollars; fortunately, I have my cheque-book in my pocket. I wish all of my wishes were so easily gratified," he said, with a little sigh, as he drew forth the book and a fountain-pen. Putting his foot on a low stump, and resting the book on his knee, he wrote out the cheque and handed it to Mrs. Worthington with an agreeable smile, that really hid no little perplexity.

"I thank you from my heart," she said, in a low tone, and, looking curiously at her, he saw that her beautiful eyes had filled with tears. "My interest will be due in two months, now, and I will return this then. I can never, never tell you how grateful I am."

"Mrs. Worthington," the young man said, swayed by

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a sudden impulse, "will you forgive me a question? Your husband is the soul of generosity; why not ask him for this money? You know that you are perfectly welcome to that, or to many times that amount, from me, but I fear that you are misjudging Howard, think him ungenerous when he is not."

"I could not, *could not* ask him," she said quickly. "I will try to explain how I feel to you, but I fear only a woman can understand me. When we were married no thought of money entered my mind at first. I had given Howard all my love; everything else was trivial. Since I could give him myself, we were equal; what he could bestow on me of wealth I could freely accept, since there could be no question between us of giving or taking. That at first was my thought; but almost immediately I saw that his money was going to raise an intangible barrier between us, as it has. Instead of treating the matter lightly, as of no account, he took such elaborate precautions not to hurt my pride—that it *was* hurt. He used so much tact and *finesse* about an affair of no moment that it gave his wealth an undue importance in our relations. I can hardly make myself clear to you, I fear," she said wistfully. "Of course, the question of money had to come up often, and whenever it did, Howard considered it his duty to treat it with such elaborate delicacy that I felt wounded. He had understood me very little, and I begin to fear that I, too, have totally misunderstood him. Things have grown worse and worse in this particular between us, until I could almost find it in my heart to wish that Howard had not a dollar in the world. With regard to this sum," she added, holding up the check that Ainslie had just given her, "there are very special reasons why I could not mention the matter to my husband. I would rather beg for it on the streets, badly as I need it."

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Ainslie sought his friend that afternoon, in more perplexity than he cared to own, and faithfully repeated to him all that had passed between Mrs. Worthington and himself.

"As regards the money question, Howard," he concluded, with a blunt frankness, "you have been a fool; you should have trusted your wife's love, and not been so intolerably afraid of hurting her pride. I can understand perfectly how your very evident fear of wounding her would be sure to do so. Don't you see? It wasn't accepting and enjoying your wealth that hurt her, but your view of the whole matter. You were an ass."

"Yes, I was, and it has led to all this misery. I could beg her pardon in the very dust for my absurdity,—but," he concluded bitterly, "the fact that I was an idiot need not have made her a——" He stopped. He could not call his wife a "thief," despite all of his anger toward her.

"You still think her guilty, do you?" Ainslie questioned curiously.

"I must."

"Why, then, did she apply to me to-day for money?"

"Because she did not have enough ready cash herself. There was only five hundred dollars in the roll of notes taken, and she has evidently realized that it is not as easy a matter to dispose of stolen jewels as she had thought."

"The jewels were her own, weren't they?" Ainslie questioned dryly. "Could she steal from herself? If your idea be true, why didn't she borrow five hundred from me instead of a thousand? Another five hundred—provided she already had a like sum in her possession—would have been sufficient to make up the mortgage money."

"Don't ask me to explain her actions," Worthington

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said wearily; "perhaps she wished enough to send the interest due, as well as the principal; perhaps she thought it well to keep a reserve on hand hereafter. As for the jewels—they were hers, of course, yet they were family jewels, and she must have known perfectly well that I would never allow them to be sold. What could be her special objection to appealing to me just now, if she were innocent? You said that she seemed particularly averse to asking me for money for this purpose."

"As you just said, Howard, 'don't ask me to explain her actions.' I am not certain yet which one of us is the fool in this case, but really, I hardly think it is yours truly."

"Have you anything to go on?" Worthington asked breathlessly. "For heaven's sake, man, remember how much this means to me! You promised me some definite information within a week."

"The week isn't up yet," was the laconic answer. "As for clues, perhaps I have some, and perhaps I haven't. I'll tell you later on. I think that I shall let your cousin look after both the ladies to-morrow and go into the city with you. I need a little apparatus."

"Roderick will not be here to-morrow," Worthington replied. "He just told me definitely that he must engage passage on Saturday's steamer. He is going up to-morrow to make some necessary arrangements. I suppose he will spend to-morrow night and Friday with us, but he is determined to leave on Saturday. I'm sorry. We shall miss him."

"Yes, we shall," Ainslie agreed, with some emphasis. "I'll modify my plans a little, but I must run up for a couple of hours, anyway. By the way, Howard, bring home with you to-morrow night a good-sized roll of bills—better make it a thousand dollars. Don't show the bills to any one, and don't mention the subject. If

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I chance to allude to it carelessly, hush me up, as if you were irritated at my thoughtlessness in making the matter known. See?"

"No; of course I don't see, but I'll follow your instructions, anyway. Did you make any use of that microscope?"

"Rather!" Ainslie returned, with a gentle smile. "It is certainly a valuable companion."

"Robert," Worthington broke out suddenly, "won't you tell me what is in your mind? Do you believe there is a shadow of possibility that my wife did not take that money?"

"Now, see here," Ainslie exclaimed energetically, "you don't care a picayune for my ideas, and you know it. What you want is downright proof, one way or the other; and proof is what I mean to give you before you are many days older. Come ahead to dinner now, and don't, under any circumstances, forget that money to-morrow."

Some way the evening dragged. Mrs. Worthington was plainly unequal to her duties as a hostess. Ainslie declined to throw himself, as usual, into the breach, and as a result the little company broke up at a very early hour. Huntingdon and Ainslie walked off to the smoking-room together, and their host saw no more of either of them until the next morning. Then Ainslie met him in the breakfast room, where they chanced to be the first to appear.

"What were you up to last night, Robert?" Worthington asked, half-angrily. "This is a very queer story that I hear about you!"

Ainslie smiled blandly. "What did you hear, old fellow?"

"I just met Roderick in the yard, and he looked so blue that I inquired what the trouble was. He tried to laugh it off, but finally owned up that he had lost a

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large sum of money to you at poker last night, and that he felt rather chagrined and poverty-stricken in consequence. I didn't know that you went in for that sort of thing, Rob."

"You're not up on all my accomplishments. You must allow me a little recreation if I am to be rusticated down here for an indefinite period. Ah, Miss Mayhew, good morning; have you any commissions for me in the city to-day?"

"Are you going to desert us, too?" Mrs Worthington cried, in mock-despair, as she entered with Huntingdon, just in time to catch Ainslie's remark. "Roderrick and my husband declare that they have important business on hand, so that Jean and I shall be thrown entirely upon our own resources."

"I shall be gone only a couple of hours," Ainslie asserted. "I would not go at all, but, unfortunately, I have a law-partner who insists on seeing me to-day, and I presume he must be humored. Can I do anything for either of you ladies?"

"Well," Miss Mayhew said slowly, "as Margaret seems disinclined to speak, I might give you a trifling commission, since you so kindly offer. I should like about a dozen of the latest novels, and some papers and magazines, five pounds of chocolate bonbons, some roses, and——"

"Have pity, Jean!" Worthington cried, amid the general laughter. "I want to see Ainslie back to-day, but if you go on with your list he will never venture to appear again."

"Don't be afraid, Miss Mayhew," Ainslie said calmly, "I am braver than Howard imagines. I shall be back this afternoon, and you will find all of your commissions faithfully fulfilled."

"You have not written them down," she suggested maliciously.

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"What need," he asked, "when you know that your words are engraved on my heart?" and Ainslie had the profound satisfaction of seeing the stately young lady blush, despite the laugh with which she turned off his words.

However, a surprise was in store for Jean Mayhew. The morning had passed rather wearily in the absence of the men, despite the warm friendship that really existed between her and Margaret. After luncheon Margaret had gone to her room, and Jean, with a book, had settled herself under the trees. She was thinking rather than reading. That Margaret was unhappy she knew, and she wondered if she had guessed the reason. Of course, it must spring from Worthington's changed manner, for Jean Mayhew's keen eyes could not fail to discern the absence of the old *bonhomie* and cordial affection. His ostentatious politeness could not cover the lack.

While she was still musing on this theme a shadow fell across her book, and she glanced up, to see Ainslie beside her, his arms full of packages.

"Here are your novels, Miss Mayhew. I trust that you will approve of my selections. Here are the papers and magazines. This package holds the bonbons, I imagine, and—here are your roses! I hope I forgot nothing," he added, with a smile, dropping the last bundle into Jean's lap and placidly stretching himself out full length on the grass beside her.

For once Jean Mayhew was at a loss for words, and Robert Ainslie noted the circumstance with satisfaction.

"What were you thinking about as I came up?" he questioned curiously.

"Of Margaret. She is not happy."

"No?"

"No, she is not, and you must be as well aware of

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the fact as I. I am afraid that some misunderstanding may have arisen between her husband and herself, Mr. Ainslie." Then, with defiant audacity: "Don't you suppose that you may be responsible for the trouble?"

"I?" asked Robert, in honest perplexity.

"Yes, you! It seems as if you were Margaret's confidant on all occasions, and—and—it isn't easy to say, but don't you think that Mr. Worthington may feel that you monopolize too much of his wife's society?"

Ainslie lay down on the grass and indulged in such a ringing laugh that his companion grew dignified and offended.

"I beg your pardon, Jean," he said suddenly, raising a grave face to hers, and seeming utterly unconscious that he had made use of her Christian name, "it really is no laughing matter, though your surmise is so far from the truth that it struck me as extremely funny. There is a misunderstanding, but it has nothing to do with me. It arose before I came here. I have nothing to do with it except that I am trying to straighten matters out. I wonder," looking at her intently, "if you couldn't help me?"

"Oh, do let me!" she cried eagerly.

He seemed to be weighing the subject. "I suppose I could manage without you, Jean, but I should really like to make assurance doubly sure. Can you stay awake all night, if necessary, and do as I tell you, without asking any questions?"

"Yes, I can—but am I not to know the meaning of it all, eventually?"

"If all goes well," he answered, "I shall consider myself at liberty to tell you the truth to-morrow, though you will have to hear it under a pledge of secrecy. Further than this I cannot promise. Is it a bargain?"

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"Yes," eagerly. "Now tell me what I am to do."

"Very well. Worthington will be home on the five o'clock train. Before that time you are to go to Margaret and not to leave her for a single second, on any pretext, until I tell you that you may. You must be at her side every instant. Don't let Huntingdon distract your attention. If she leaves the room, go with her. Say that you are ill and nervous, and make her sleep with you to-night. Don't you go to sleep, however. Get up and read these novels. You will find enough here to keep you engaged until daylight. Jean, this is no light task, I know. If you undertake it, it must be faithfully performed. Are you sure you understand?"

"Yes, I think so. I am not to let Margaret out of my sight from five o'clock to-night until you absolve me from my mission."

"That is right. Will you do it?"

"Tell me first that you are not harboring any unjust and unkind thoughts about her."

"I am not," Ainslie returned earnestly. "It is because I believe her to be as pure and good and true as you, *yourself*, that I beseech you to do this thing. I want you to do it for *her* sake. Will you?"

"Yes," Miss Mayhew answered heartily, "I will. There is my hand on it. I will be a perfect martinet. Your instructions shall be carried out to the letter."

"Thank you," Ainslie replied, kissing her hand with bold audacity. "It is comforting to know that I have a coadjutor. Now I must leave you."

"Can't you stay?" she inquired quickly. "It is pleasanter out here than in the house."

"Of course it is, since you are here, but I have some work that must be done at once. I wish I *could* stay," he added regretfully.

"At least, let me thank you for these exquisite roses,

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and for all the rest of my treasures," she said smilingly. "I'm afraid that I cannot repay you for all your trouble."

"I'll let you do that to-morrow," he returned seriously. "Now, *au revoir*, and be sure that you do not fail me to-night."

Jean looked after him in profound perplexity. The mystery was too deep for her reading. Presently she gathered up her packages and went in search of Margaret.

She would begin her task at once. As she passed the study she heard Ainslie softly whistling within, and wondered anew what important "work" had taken him into the house.

Margaret seemed grateful for her company, and her task therefore promised to be comparatively easy. At dinner-time, Miss Mayhew devoted considerable covert attention to her host, and was surprised to find how little he contributed to the sparkling conversation which, as usual, enlivened the meal. Only once did Jean see him roused from monosyllabic replies.

The servants were removing the numerous side dishes and bringing in some luscious fruit, when Ainslie suddenly looked up.

"I say, Howard," he ejaculated, "did old Seton find you to-day? He had been out on a collecting tour and had an immense roll of bills—nearly a thousand dollars, I should think. It was too late to bank, and he wanted to turn it over to you."

Worthington frowned.

"He found me," he answered shortly, and hurriedly commenced to relate a funny incident that had come under his notice that day.

"Did he make you take it, Howard? Did you have to bring it home with you?"

Worthington's frown deepened, and, as the servants

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just then passed from the room, he turned sharply on Ainslie.

"I had to bring it home, of course. Now let the matter drop, please. I don't care to have the servants too well informed on such subjects."

Naturally, the talk then ended, and the host again became taciturn. The evening was unusually gay and the hour, when the little group broke up, was quite late. Margaret yielded without difficulty to Jean's plea that Mrs. Worthington would share her room that night. Margaret seemed weary, and was soon sound asleep. Jean felt as if she never again would be able to sleep. She slipped from the bed and hurriedly dressed herself, taking her station by an open window. She was too excited and nervous to follow Ainslie's advice and read; besides, she dared not have a light for fear of waking Margaret. One hour dragged wearily after another. A clock somewhere had struck four. Jean was still at her post, every faculty on the alert, and Margaret was still sleeping peacefully, when a pistol shot rang through the house.

Jean sprang to her feet in uncontrollable terror and rushed into the hall. From the lower corridor voices floated up to her. She could plainly distinguish Ainslie's tones as well as Huntingdon's and Worthington's. All three of the men seemed passionately angry, but none of them evidently was injured. Somewhat reassured, and mindful of her promise to Ainslie, she slipped back to her post, leaving the door of her room open. Margaret still slept.

For an hour the sound of the voices floated up indistinctly; then she suddenly heard the noise of an automobile in the yard, and a few moments later the three men emerged from the house and rushed rapidly off. Jean would have been more than mortal if she had not been nearly consumed with curiosity. She grew too

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impatient to remain seated, and her restless movements around the room eventually woke Margaret.

Jean felt remorseful as she saw Margaret's eyes open wearily.

"I beg your pardon ten thousand times, dearest, for disturbing you; but, since you *are* awake, won't you please get up and dress? I do so want to go out among the flowers."

Margaret faintly objected, but good-naturedly allowed herself to be overruled, and at six o'clock the two girls found themselves in the cool morning air. They had only taken a turn or two on the lawn when Jean heard a car rapidly approaching, and a moment later Worthington and Ainslie appeared in the yard.

"I call this luck!" Ainslie exclaimed sincerely. "I was wanting to see you, Miss Mayhew, but I feared that it would be many weary hours before you regaled my eyes with your presence. Will you come for a stroll with me?"

"Shall I go, Margaret?" Jean asked eagerly.

"Please do, Miss Mayhew, for I want to monopolize my wife's attention for a little while," interposed Worthington. Dear, will you come into my study, please?"

There was a curiously humble and entreating note in Worthington's voice which Jean did not fail to notice, even as she turned away with Ainslie.

"I kept my promise, Mr. Ainslie," she said brightly. "I did not close my eyes at all last night. Of course, I am perishing with curiosity, but do not tell your story unless it is right that you should do so."

"I think it is right, Jean. I would not tell any one else, certainly, but I know that you will respect my confidence—and I have a special reason for wishing you to know all about my connection with this matter. Now, listen," and Ainslie graphically detailed to her

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astonished ears every circumstance connected with the robbery up to the time of his own interview with her the day before.

"Now, you can see, Jean, why I wanted your help. I believed from the first that Margaret was innocent, despite all of the incriminating circumstances against her. I wanted your help in case my plans should miscarry. If the money vanished again, and I did not catch the culprit red-handed, as I hoped to do, I still wanted your evidence to prove that Margaret did not have an opportunity to go unobserved to the study. Do you see?"

"I see that much; and, of course, Margaret never knew anything of the first robbery. Still, how *did* you explain to yourself her presence outside the study door, and then her denial of it, even after her husband had heard her voice?"

"Ventriloquism, Jean. I don't deserve any of the admiration which Worthington is inclined to bestow on me for this affair, for I got onto the clue in a flash, even as he was telling me the story. There was no use giving him my theories, so I went to work for proof. You see, I had known at college that Huntingdon was a sneak and coward, and a man isn't apt to change his moral nature very much after he leaves college. Then, half a dozen years ago I chanced to attend an amateur entertainment at which Huntingdon took the part of a ventriloquist and performed all manner of clever tricks.

"It was sheer good luck that made me remember that incident as Worthington brought me up here that first night. I had never liked Huntingdon and I did like Margaret. I suppose that was the real explanation."

"But how did you prove his guilt?" Jean asked, in a whirl of amazement.

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"I built up my theory first. I had known for some time that Huntingdon was hard up. It seemed probable to me that he might have gotten a false key made in the city. He had plenty of opportunities to take an impression of the lock. Then he waited his opportunity. He knew that Margaret would have her jewels here sooner or later. When Howard gave her an extra key it lessened Huntingdon's chances of detection. I presumed that on the evening of the robbery he had gone into the study without noticing in the twilight that Howard was asleep on the lounge. He had secured the money and jewelry, when he incautiously made some noise that awoke Worthington, and he heard his cousin rise and fumble for a match. If a light were struck then, Huntingdon would inevitably be detected in the crime. So, with superb presence of mind, he simulated Margaret's voice outside the door. The ruse succeeded. As Howard left the room, he followed, and a few moments later made those remarks to his cousin which confirmed the belief of Margaret's presence in the hall and made Worthington nearly frantic with suspicion. This was my theory, and next day, when I succeeded in getting a powerful magnifying glass, I examined the lock of the safe with it and could easily detect traces of wax. Then I was sure of my premises, but Huntingdon had been infernally shrewd. He had contrived to throw suspicion on Margaret; consequently, Worthington could make no move in the matter and would not even allude to his loss."

"You are a veritable genius," Jean exclaimed; "but how did you ever get at the truth—to prove it, I mean?"

"I reasoned that Huntingdon would do nothing with the diamonds in this country; it would be risky. He had five hundred dollars. That would take him to Eu-

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rope. Once there, he could unset the stones, dispose of them separately and be practically safe from detection. I think he disliked my presence here, and half-suspected my motive in coming; so he resolved to go to Europe at once. It was necessary for the success of my plans that he should again be short of cash. Two nights ago I inveigled him into a game of poker, and as we put the stakes rather high I won easily all he had. I can't swear, though, Jean, that I played a strictly honest game."

She smiled. "I think you may count yourself absolved, anyway. Oh, how despicable that man is! I never liked him. I could hardly forgive myself if I had ever entertained any friendly feelings for him."

"Didn't you really like him, Jean?" Ainslie asked quickly. "That is a burden off my heart, for I half feared that you did. Well, that is about all there is to tell. Of course, he could not go to Europe without money, so I had Howard bring home a goodly roll yesterday, and, according to previous agreement, we made the matter fully known at the dinner-table. Huntingdon could hardly afford to let that chance slip, I thought, so I made ready for him: When I left you yesterday I rigged up an electric battery. It connected with the lock of the safe and with a small pistol. If everything worked all right, the pistol would go off as the safe door was opened. Still, I was a little afraid that my work was not very perfect, and that Huntingdon might slip in noiselessly, get the booty, and we, listening in the next room, be none the wiser. So I put you on guard over Margaret. I wished to prove that she was *not* the culprit, even if I could not prove who *was*."

"Your scheme was a success, of course?" Jean remarked.

"Yes; we waited in the library in total darkness.

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We dared not smoke or talk or read, for fear of betraying our presence. I suppose that Howard suffered tortures, for he didn't know what was coming. At last there came the pistol shot, and we rushed into the hall, to meet Huntingdon with the bills actually in his hand! Howard flashed a dark lantern in his face and I covered him with a revolver."

"Oh!" and Jean drew a deep breath; "how unutterably horrible it all is! Of course, he had to confess."

"At last, yes; though it took some forcible persuasion to convince him that he would better do so. Howard has his confession, duly signed and attested by me, and he also has the diamonds. We allowed Huntingdon to keep the thousand dollars provided he leaves the country never to turn up again. We took him to the train when we went off."

Jean walked on in silence for a long time, pondering the story. At last she said, "You told me that you had a special reason for wishing me to know this story. What is it?"

"Well," Ainslie responded gravely, "it is one of my convictions that a man ought not to keep any secrets from his wife, and, as I hope you will consent to be my wife, I thought that I would better tell you all about this affair."

Jean looked up at him in indignant surprise, not knowing just what he meant.

"You acknowledged yesterday, Jean," he said lightly, "that you owed me a debt of gratitude for executing your commissions so faithfully. You would better give me your hand as payment. Do, dear," he added, with a sudden change of expression, and with a look in his eyes that caused Jean to forget her anger and made her say softly:

"If you really think I ought to do so——"

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Then those two young people wandered far away into that "new world, which is the old."

It was nearly two hours later when they reached Worthington's house.

"I almost dread to go in," Jean said nervously.

"Why, are you ashamed of me?" Ainslie asked, with mischief in his eyes.

"I wasn't thinking of you at all then," Jean rejoined, with a little blush. "I was wondering on what terms we should find Margaret and her husband. I hardly see how she can forgive him."

"Couldn't you forgive me for a like offense?"

"I shouldn't like to be tried, Robert. In the first place, I do not believe you would ever doubt me, no matter how strong the circumstantial evidence against me might be."

"No, Jean, you are right," Ainslie said gravely. "I certainly should never doubt you; but I hope that Margaret will prove forgiving. Come, we shall probably find them in the study."

They were there, as Ainslie had surmised, and it needed only one glance at their faces to show that all was well with them.

Margaret met Ainslie with outstretched hands.

"I have just been hearing how true a friend you have been to me. I thank you from my heart, but words seem very poor to express my feelings. You need not wait for my allowance, after all, Mr. Ainslie. Here is my husband's check for a thousand dollars. We are not going to have any more misunderstandings on the money score."

Ainslie smiled down on her with cordial friendliness. "Mrs. Worthington, there is just one little thing which I still fail to understand. I wonder if you will enlighten me? Why were you so reluctant to ask Howard for this particular sum?"

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Margaret blushed and hesitated, feeling the eyes of all upon her.

"Yes, dear," Worthington said. "I want to understand that, too. Whatever your feelings ordinarily, I should have thought that you would have applied to me on this occasion."

"I must tell you, I suppose, though I had not intended to do so. You read the first part of my letter to mother, so you know that I promised to get her the money. I intended to ask you for it. Of course, I disliked doing so, but under the circumstances I saw no other course. I went downstairs to find you. You did not hear me open the door. You were reading mother's letter to me, and I softly slipped out again. I thought that, of course, you would give me the money at once, voluntarily; you never mentioned the matter, although you knew my need. I could not appeal to you after that."

Worthington sighed. "My love, I don't see how you can find it in your heart to forgive all of my stupid idiocy. I have been cruel and——"

Margaret laid her fingers on his lips. "Hush," she said gently.

**WHEN CUPID MADE
LAWS FOR ROME**



WHEN CUPID MADE LAWS FOR ROME

"Promise me," the man said insistently.

Valeria looked up impatiently. "You know that I can make no promise; the laws of Rome forbid a patrician to wed with a plebeian."

Canuleius drew a deep breath. "I had forgotten; but that is a trifle. I shall have that law repealed, if— Are you willing to marry one of the common people?"

"I?" the maiden's eyes softened. "It is not a question that rests with me. The laws of Rome give me no choice. I must wed a patrician."

"But if no such law existed?" he persisted.

"I—I would not refuse to listen to you then."

"And your father?"

"Father is more liberal than the majority of the patricians. He says that our class has usurped more and more of power until now the nobles are indolent, luxurious, and vicious. You remember Appius Claudius and how Virginius killed his daughter to save her from the hands of that wretch? There are many such among our class—many. Father fears for Rome."

"And he does like me, I think," Canuleius broke in eagerly.

"Yes, he helped to elect you tribune of the people; did he never tell you that? He thinks that you are ambitious, talented, and honorable."

The young Roman's face flushed. "I shall try to

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prove my title to that praise. Valeria, listen! I shall hold you to your word; that unjust law regulating the marriages of the Roman people shall be repealed——”

The maiden laughed, half-mockingly. “Because you have compelled the Senate to restore to the common people some of their ancient rights, do you hold yourself omnipotent? That law the Senate will never repeal.”

“That law the Senate shall repeal,” her companion said vehemently. “It should never have been written on the statute books; it is a disgrace to our manhood. I pledge you my honor, Valeria, that this obnoxious law shall be annulled. Then—may I come and claim you?”

The girl retreated a few steps, drawing her veil more closely around her. “When—if—if you achieve the impossible you will deserve any reward that you may see fit to claim.”

He started forward eagerly, but she had fled, and he dared not follow.

In a certain way he had known her all of his life. As a leader of the plebeians, frequent errands took him to her father’s house, and he generally caught a brief glimpse of her, either in the outer court or in one of the adjoining apartments, where she could hear their conversation.

When he spoke in the forum his eyes invariably discerned Valeria and her father listening intently to every syllable. Yet he had not spoken directly to her—in words—more than half a dozen times in all of his life. Lately, perchance through a kindly arrangement of the gods and perhaps through some strategy on Valeria’s own part, the two had met in the spacious grounds of her home.

Canuleius had made those few times count. His wooing had been fiery and impetuous; of the great

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barrier separating them so sternly, he had not thought until Valeria reminded him of it. After all, that was a bagatelle, now that he had touched the maiden's virgin heart.

He drew himself up proudly; he would begin the battle that very day. Valeria should see that his boast was no idle one.

That night at the evening meal in the triclinium, Valeria's father, as usual, rehearsed the gossip of the street for the delectation of the women of his household.

"There was something of importance to-day that came before the Senators. I think that there will be trouble in Rome before the matter is settled."

Valeria leaned forward on her couch breathlessly. "Tell us, father."

"That young tribune of the common people, Caius Canuleius, demands the repeal of the law forbidding a patrician and a plebeian to marry."

"Well?" There was repressed excitement in her tone. So he had at least made the daring attempt, although, of course, nothing could come of it!

"Well," Vitellius said slowly, "there was a furious outbreak among the Senators; they were wild with anger; if they had not been afraid of the masses they would have thrown Canuleius into prison. They knew better, though, than to touch him; the plebeians worship him."

"And the law? What do you think of it? He will not succeed in having it repealed?"

"The law is most iniquitous and unjust—as to his success, there were but three of us Senators willing to vote for its repeal."

"Then, of course, he can do nothing."

"I am not so sure on that point, Valeria," her father returned gravely. "I know Canuleius somewhat, and

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he never abandons any project that he has undertaken. I had a glimpse of him when the storm of opposition was at its greatest fury; his lips were closed firmly and in his eyes was a look of the most defiant determination that I ever saw. He will not yield an inch, and the plebeians will back him in any demand that he may make."

"And—then—what will happen?"

"I do not know, Valeria. The patricians as a whole are hot-headed and arrogant. So far as my vote and my voice go, I am with Canuleius. The Senate as a body is determined, and so is he; I cannot predict the outcome, but there will be another struggle between the two classes—one of those struggles which places Rome in the greatest jeopardy."

Valeria leaned back on her couch, toying with the Eastern dainties before her. Was she—a mere maiden—the cause of this conflict? Should she interpose and forbid Canuleius to proceed further with his demands? He would not listen to her—she knew that well upon reflection. There was nothing to do but to wait. Perhaps, after all, the matter would die out, and there be no further commotion. The law could not be repealed, she felt assured.

She waited as calmly as possible through the anxious days immediately following.

Each one brought a renewal of the demand made by Canuleius. Each day the plebeians were more and more determined in their support of him. The Senate did not dare silence him, yet only Valeria's father and two friends of his would vote for the annulment of the infamous law.

Neither side would yield and every person lived at a nervous tension, dreading a civil uprising and wholesale massacre.

Then, to the relief of the Senate, came the news of

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outside troubles. Rome, in the insolence of her power, had appropriated the land belonging to Ardea; the Ardeans revolted. The same messenger brought tidings of a revolt among the Venitians; they were pillaging the Roman frontiers—and, as if this were not enough, the Volscians and Aequans declared war against Rome because the Romans had broken their treaty and had fortified Verrugo.

Even in the midst of their danger the Senators rejoiced that something had arisen to divert the populace from the demand made by the tribune.

"Are we really in danger, father," Valeria asked, terrified by the ominous murmurs that she heard on all sides, and by the war edicts issued by the consuls.

"We are in more danger from Romans than from any outside foe. When Romans stand shoulder to shoulder they can conquer the world."

"And they will stand shoulder to shoulder, now, certainly they will, father!"

Vitellius smiled grimly. "You know little of the tribune, Canuleius, if you think that an edict of war or any greater thing, even, can turn him from his purpose. The Senate ordered all business to be dropped, except what might pertain to the raising of an army. The fools think that Canuleius can be blocked so easily."

"And can he not?"

"Why, look you, child, the city is placarded with orders calling for levies of men to serve as soldiers—an immense force all told; the aediles and quaestors are to attend to this matter immediately—so many men drafted from each district here in Rome—so many men from each of the outlying districts——"

"They will respond, surely."

"Canuleius will not allow them to respond, Valeria."

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"He will not allow—I do not understand. Is he, then, a coward?"

"No; but he sees that the Senate has been eager to grasp this excuse of war so as to shove his demand into the background. He announced to-day that not a single plebeian would respond to the summons of the patricians until the marriage-law had been annulled."

"And—the Senate?"

"The Senators are appalled; they never anticipated such defiance. To-morrow Canuleius addresses the people from the forum on this subject. Do you wish to hear him?"

"Yes, father; I beg of you to take me."

And thus it chanced that she who inspired his speech was present when Canuleius made the most eloquent appeal of his life, when he spoke in that long-ago of the freedom and equity which we hold to-day as our most sacred birthright.

Valeria's eyes never left his face, and every word that he uttered sank deep into her heart and memory.

"Plebeians, you are Roman citizens, but the patricians deem you unworthy to live in the same city with them—unworthy to breathe the same air—unworthy to possess the same human semblance. We demand merely the right of intermarriage—a right which they grant to neighbors and to foreigners—but which they deny to us, their brethren!

"I demand no new right for you—merely an old right which they have wantonly wrested from us. Because I spoke here for justice I was attacked not an hour ago—attacked in the hall of the Senate by one of the members of that brave body; had his courage been equal to his villainy I should not be alive now to address you.

"Do you not perceive in what contempt we are held?

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If the patricians had the power they would take from us this very light of heaven. Forsooth, they deem it a grievous offense that we have the same speech as they—that we possess the same senses that they do!

"I swear that unless they give us this right we will not lift a finger to defend the walls of Rome. We will be treated better by a foreign conqueror than by our own brothers here in Rome.

"Numa Pompilius was king of Rome. Do the patricians suppose that we are ignorant of his history? He was no Roman—only a Sabine. Lucius Tarquinius was not even an Italian—he was an emigrant from Tarquinii, and yet he was made King, though the sons of Ancus were living. Servius Tullius, the son of a slave, was made King because of his great wisdom and integrity—these were the things done in the elder days, when Rome was ruled by a King. Yet were the Kings deposed because it was declared that the people had no power. We plebeians had much more power in that period. Hear me, Senators and patricians! unless this just demand of ours be granted at once, and marriage between plebeians and patricians be permitted, with no further parley, then will we not only allow Rome's foes to march hither unopposed, but we will also demand that one of your two Consuls be elected from the common people."

Valeria heard her father catch his breath sharply. She looked up anxiously into his face.

"That was shrewd, shrewd," Vitellius muttered; "that will bring them to terms. Canuleius knows how to deal with them. Rather than allow Rome to be conquered, and rather especially than have a plebeian Consul, they will concede his first demand concerning the marriage statute."

Canuleius talked on and on; the sound of his vehement eloquence reached Valeria's ear, but she was

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occupied with but one thought—her father, who was a keen judge in all matters of state, had declared that Canuleius had taken a stand which must win for him the day. If so, he would demand from her his promised guerdon.

Was she willing to pay it?

A strange tremor and fear took possession of her. How had she come to make such a rash promise? Was she, indeed, willing to give her hand to this man?

She was glad when the speech was ended and she could return home. All that night the feeling of dread filled her heart. Why had she been so foolish?

It was with positive terror that she waited the next day for her father's return from the Senate.

What news would he bring?

He entered thoughtfully and slowly. He saw the question on Valeria's lips which her voice refused to utter.

"You want to know of to-day's proceedings? Rome is making history fast. Canuleius has carried his point and the marriage-law has been repealed. The plebeians have taken up his demand for a Consul to represent them, and to-day they were so violent in their demonstrations that the Senate was obliged to act at once, for, in truth, the enemies of Rome are almost at our gates."

"And what was the outcome?"

"The struggle was bitter. The repeal of the marriage-law was passed, though, very speedily; but the Senators had waited too long. That alone did not appease the plebeians as it would have done in the first instance. They demanded their Consul, and in the end a compromise was effected. No change will be made in the election of Consuls, though I think that in the end the plebeians will carry this point, too, now that Canuleius has once raised it; but hereafter three

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tribunes will be elected, and they can be from either class—all from the plebeians or all from the patricians, or part from one class and part from the other. They will be called military tribunes, and they will have consular power in all affairs relating to war or peace."

"And—Canuleius?"

"He takes his victory very quietly; like a true patrician. He shows no undue elation or pride. He has done merely what he said that he would do."

"You like him?"

"Why, yes, quite well. I admire his energy and determination. He has always come to me for advice, and I have given it to him as best I could. He is coming this afternoon upon some matter or other. He seemed to think that it was a subject of vital importance."

Valeria's heart stopped beating for the moment. He was coming, and she did not as yet know her heart. His impetuosity and eagerness had swept her along like an irresistible force. But now——

She fled to her own apartment, and it was not until hours later, when an imperative summons from her father came, that she left the room. She found Vitellius and Canuleius alone in her father's private audience room—the room to which his clients and debtors went in the early morning hours to present their claims and to ask favors.

Vitellius was standing in the center of the room, a graver expression on his face than Valeria had ever seen there before.

"My daughter, I quite understand now why Canuleius fought so hard for the repeal of that marriage law. He tells me that you were to be the guerdon of his victory. If you care for him, I shall say no word of opposition; I had rather that you wed a clean, honorable plebeian like Canuleius than a licentious noble

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like Appius Claudius and his ilk. Speak from your heart, Valeria, for I would know the truth. Do you wish to marry Canuleius?"

Valeria looked up, terrified and timid. Why had the decision been left to her? She felt the compelling gaze of the tribune upon her. She could not retract her spoken word. She had given him her promise—given it voluntarily and freely, albeit, thoughtlessly.

"Yes—I—I—promised," she said falteringly.

Canuleius's eyes lightened and he took an eager step to her side, then he halted, touching neither hand nor garment of the maiden.

For some moments he looked silently and steadily at her downcast face, and then he said imperiously to Vitellius, "I will not claim your daughter yet. Perchance she gave me her pledge without full consideration. If that be so, I give her back her promise. At least let her consider until I return from this war into which Rome's arrogant nobles have plunged us."

"You—go?" The maiden's eyes were lifted for one swift second.

"No Roman can remain quietly at home when his country's life is threatened. I go—I hope to return in safety—but whether I live or perish, your promise is your own again. Unless you feel that you can give me your heart do not offer me your pledge again. If you can come to me without a fear or doubt—tell me so when I come home—that will be reward enough for a thousand dangers braved."

He looked at her questioningly, but she said nothing in reply. With a low bow to Vitellius he turned to leave the room. His step was already echoing in the outer corridor when he heard a sudden rush of footsteps behind him.

He turned to see Valeria; both hands were outstretched. There was no timidity or fear

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now on her face; instead a confident assurance and trust.

"Do—do—you insist upon waiting for my promise until your return?" she queried archly.

A QUESTION OF MORALS



A QUESTION OF MORALS

"Peggy, I am breaking the tenth commandment most outrageously. I envy you your charming home, I covet Sydney Junior, and——" Grey broke off abruptly as a motor car ran slowly past the house. "Who is that?" he asked.

Mrs. Latimore looked questioningly at her brother. "Now, I wonder why you ask. You are not often curious."

The man's eyes danced. Although he had not seen his sister for some years, he could read her thoughts as easily as ever. "My dearest child, don't fly off at a tangent! I have no intention of falling in love with the Unknown, though she is certainly a striking looking woman. Why don't you like her?"

Margaret Latimore embroidered in silence for a few moments. "Is my dislike so evident? I—I am sorry. Perhaps I am narrow, Don, and prejudiced, but—but I distrust her. Yet every man seems to admire her. You, too, Don. What do you see in her?"

"She has beauty, Peggy, and that appeals to the masculine eye. Tell me about her, like a good girl."

"Her name is Van Gorder. She is a widow. Mr. Van Gorder has been dead only a few months. She has no children, and until her husband died, she lived in California. I never met her until her return. She is living now with her father. I fancy that she has not much means of her own, but of course Mr. Jerrold is wealthy, and she is an only child."

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"Jerrold? Do you mean the man who owns all of those mills and swears by Sydney?"

"Yes."

Margaret's eyes were on her work again and Grey studied her face thoughtfully.

Ever since his arrival he had imagined that some element of which he knew nothing had entered into his sister's life.

"Peggy," he demanded abruptly, "have you been happy all through these years of your married life? Sydney seems a prince of good fellows and he certainly worships you and the boy. He is making his mark as a physician, young as he is . . . You have been happy?"

"Yes, Don," there was an unmistakable intensity in her voice, "have no doubts on that score. I do not think that it is granted to many women to know as perfect happiness as I have tasted."

"I hoped so, dear, and yet—I wanted to hear you say it. Once or twice—but never mind now. Will Sydney be at home to-night? This will be my last evening, you know, and I hope that his patients will leave him in peace."

"I certainly trust that for once—oh, here he is now!"

Donald Grey looked approvingly at his tall, broad-shouldered, athletic brother-in-law as he swung across the lawn and sprang up the steps of the porch.

Sydney Junior halted him halfway by a sudden dive into his arms. Dr. Latimore tossed the boy up in the air, and then, heedless of possible passersby, stooped to kiss his wife.

"Going to be at home to-night, old fellow? I must be off to-morrow, and I was just saying to Peggy that I wished your patients would be considerate and let us have an uninterrupted evening."

"I'll not go out again unless the unexpected happens."

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I arranged things to-day so that we could have this evening together."

"Has anything gone wrong, Sydney?" his wife asked in a quick undertone.

He turned to her with a smile. "You see everything, dear. Yes, I am vexed, annoyed, enraged. Peter Michaels died this afternoon——"

"But you have known for some time that he could not possibly recover——"

"Yes; it was not the fact of his dying, but the cowardly part that he played just before he died that has gripped hold of me. I can't get over it, and Mrs. Michaels never will—never. She has absolutely adored her husband through thirty years of married life. I tell you that the memory of those perfect years would have been the supremest comfort to her now. They would have taken off the bitterest edge of her sorrow—but the coward spoiled it all——" He sprang restlessly to his feet and commenced to pace the veranda.

His wife dropped her work and looked at him wonderingly. "Can you tell us what happened?"

"Michaels knew that he was dying. Instead of leaving his wife with her beautiful memories and untarnished faith, he told a pitiful story of his youth. Its trail dragged through the first years of his married life—then the woman died. The child is a man now—prospering out West. Michaels saw that he had his chance in life. There's nothing that the wife can do—— Why couldn't the fool have kept still?"

"He felt, I suppose," Grey said thoughtfully, "that he must have her forgiveness."

"So he said," Latimore rejoined dryly; "but I shall never forget the expression on her face as he told the story. It will haunt me till I die. Can't you see the brutal selfishness of it all? Michaels was thinking only of himself—of what he wanted. Couldn't he have left

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that poor woman in peace? His dying is nothing compared to the blow of this revelation. All her treasured memories—all his tenderness and love and sympathy throughout these years—every gift he ever gave her—every caress—has been desecrated now in her eyes. . . . Isn't that so, Margaret?" he turned abruptly to his wife.

"Yes," she assented quickly, "that is surely true."

"And you agree with me, don't you, dear?—that if he had loved her with the highest kind of love—a love that was really unselfish and that pushed his own longings into the background—that he would have died with the story untold?"

"Yes—if he cared most for her happiness, if he were thinking of her alone."

"He had no right to think of himself at that moment. He died a sort of moral murderer—he had killed everything that was dear and sacred in their lives. It was a cruel, cowardly deed."

"See here, Sydney," Grey interposed, "wouldn't moralists say that he acted nobly in confessing? That he had no right to die with such an unacknowledged stigma on his soul?"

"Abstract morals are one thing," Latimore retorted hotly; "real life is another. Unselfishness is the highest morality in the world. It's odd how the real nature of people comes out on deathbeds—we physicians see a lot of despicable selfishness. A mother exacts some pledge from a child or a husband from a wife—something that will fetter all their future lives. Then the deathbed confessions which rack the hearts of the living and can do no practical good—as in this case—I have no patience with it all——"

"Then you'll make no deathbed confessions?" Grey demanded lightly.

"Not a single one!" Latimore laughed, but

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the words rang emphatically; "I'll try to make practical atonement for my misdeeds while I live and to show my repentance of any sins by different living, but when I come to die——"

"Sydney! Don't, please!"

"All right, dear. We might find a pleasanter subject for conversation, that's a fact, but—What is it, Dick?" as his office boy appeared in the doorway.

"You're wanted at the 'phone, sir."

Dr. Latimore deposited his son on the floor and started for the office. Halfway across the porch he paused.

"Who wants me, Dick?"

"Why, I think that it is Mrs. Van Gorder, sir."

Latimore dropped into a chair. "Just say that I'm engaged now, and will call up later. She can give you any message."

Margaret looked at her husband curiously while his brother-in-law laughed outright. "You don't seem very anxious to get patients, Syd. Is that good business tact?"

Latimore shrugged his shoulders. "There are some cases where—— Well, Dick?"

"It was Mrs. Van Gorder, sir. She is not feeling well and would like to have you call this evening."

"There go our plans for the evening—smashed to pieces. I knew it would be that way." There was strong disgust in Grey's voice.

"Don't worry, Don; I've no intention of going."

"Can you afford to neglect a professional call?"

"I'll fix it some way," Latimore asserted.

His wife glanced up. "Mrs. Van Gorder went past here in her motor car just before you came, Sydney; she can hardly be very ill, I presume."

"She's not ill at all, dear, not in the slightest degree, but, well—she's one of those women who always want

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some man to be dancing attendance on her. She is debarred from having a group of admirers around her now, because of her deep mourning. As there is no young clergyman around, a tolerably young physician is the next best thing."

"No clergyman?"

"Oh, that type of woman always likes to have a young minister for spiritual consolation. That is what it is called. He must be young and good looking, then she will become very devout and have excuses for seeing him daily. Sometimes a scandal crops up if the fellow's wife gets jealous, but, of course, she doesn't care if a home is broken up, so long as she has the only amusement of that sort which is permitted to a woman in mourning."

Grey's eyes were full of laughter. "And since there's no young, good-looking clergyman in this place, are we to infer——"

"Exactly what you please, Don. The truth is quite obvious. I'm not much in myself, but I happen to be the only one of my sex exactly available for her purposes just now. She is not ill. Has not been since she came here. Yet I have been sent for almost daily ever since her arrival. And—I don't like it. I fancy that I wasn't made to be any one's fool or puppet."

"She must have run up a nice bill," Grey remarked easily; "or do you give her a big discount something after the fashion of wholesale stores?"

Dr. Latimore puffed away on his cigar for a few moments before answering. "I—I—haven't sent in any bill yet at all. It is time to do so, though—quite time. And, no, Don—there'll be no discount; just the reverse, in fact."

Margaret's laugh bubbled out in the old spontaneous manner which her brother had missed ever since his arrival. "What will you do with all your wealth?"

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"There must be quite a fortune coming to you?"

"I'll turn it over to you, sweetheart; get yourself a fur coat for next winter."

His wife made a very wry face. "I—I am not just sure that I want the money; but—well, we'll see. Come in to dinner now before any more patients call you up."

They lingered over the meal unconscionably, for the three had many things in common and they had been chums in the old days when the men were college classmates and no tie bound Margaret to Sydney Latimore.

As they passed at last from the dining-room to the library, Latimore halted at the telephone.

The one-sided conversation drifted to the other two.

"Is this Mr. Jerrold's residence?"

"Yes, I would like to speak to Mr. Jerrold, if you please."

Margaret arched her eyebrows in surprise. Why did Syd speak to the father of the patient and not to Mrs. Van Gorder herself?

"This is Dr. Latimore, Mr. Jerrold. It is hardly possible for me to get over to your house this evening, but Mrs. Van Gorder telephoned that she was not feeling well——"

"Then you think——"

"All right, thank you."

"I am much obliged. Of course if you thought it imperative I would make——"

"Good night."

Latimore hung up the receiver and strode into the library.

"Sydney! Why didn't you ask for Mrs. Van Gorder?"

"Because it struck me that it might be a good thing for her father to get an inkling of how affairs stand. He is almost invariably away when I call; he seemed

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very much surprised to-night that she had telephoned for a physician——” Latimore laughed at some recollection. “Now for an old-time evening. We’ll talk, Margaret shall sing to us—she’ll not mind if we smoke.” Latimore burrowed more deeply into his Morris chair. He stretched out one long arm across his wife’s shoulder; “I call this comfort,” he sighed contentedly.

Some hours later, Grey rose reluctantly. “Margaret ought to be in bed; send her off, Syd. I’ll get a breath of fresh air, and then come back for a last cigar before we turn in.”

“All right.”

As Grey left the room Latimore picked up a pile of letters. “You were making out my bills for me to-day, dear?”

“Yes, those of which you left the memoranda.”

“Will you make out one more now?”

“Mrs. Van Gorder’s?” Margaret hesitated over the name.

“Yes,” Latimore smiled. “I have a fancy that I would like you to attend to this. Will you take the dates?”

Margaret picked up a pen and dipped it into the ink.

From his vest-pocket her husband drew forth a little book. “Here are the dates, sweetheart; put them all in; make it very formal and businesslike. Ready?” Margaret nodded. She could not trust her voice just then. Her pen flew rapidly for some little time. “Sydney!”—there was a note almost of laughter in her voice—“suppose I send the almanac-leaves for the last few months. You have been there daily!”

“I know; still we’ll do it up in proper shape. I fancy that I shall never have another summons from Mrs. Van Gorder. Make the charges double what they usu-

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ally are, Peggy—and dear, direct the envelope to Mr. Jerrold, not to her.”

“To Mr. Jerrold, Syd?”

“Yes, I want him to know just how things are—and after my telephoning to-night—well, he’s quick as a flash. He’ll understand, and I imagine,” he smiled as if in pleasant anticipation, “I imagine that she’ll have rather a bad half-hour of it with her father.”

“All—all right, dear, I’ll—I’ll do it. Oh, Sydney! Sydney!” and Margaret’s head was down on the table, while her husband stood appalled at the sound of tempestuous sobs.

He gathered her up in his strong arms as if she had been a mere child, and still holding her, sank again into the Morris chair.

“What is the trouble, Margaret—sweetheart? It is not because Don is leaving? No! It must be something more than that! Tell me, dear!”

He whispered soothing, caressing words until at last Margaret’s sobs ceased and she lay quiet, exhausted, in his arms.

“I—suppose if I were unselfish, Sydney—as you were saying people ought to be—that I would have more strength and would never tell you; but—but—some way I could not control myself, and now—and now you know that something has been wrong, and—and——”

“Why should you not tell me, Margaret? What I said about Michaels can have no application to you——”

“I—I am not so sure, dear. I’m afraid—I know that I am going to hurt you—if I were stronger I could have hidden my feelings and never let you know how—how—I have doubted you these last few months——”

“Doubted me? I never guessed it! You mean——”

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there was a strange thrill in Latimore's voice.

"Yes, I mean—Lucia Van Gorder——. I—I—forgive me, Sydney! You were there so often—and you never said anything to let me know that you read her clearly—and so—and so——"

"And so"—Latimore kissed the flushed, tear-stained cheeks—"and so you thought that I had failed in allegiance to you. Margaret"—his voice sounded stern in its earnestness—"I shall never do that——"

"I know it, dearest," Margaret said humbly; "I—I—think that I must have been insane. Forgive me——"

"Don't ask me for forgiveness, sweetheart. I must have been to blame—but I never dreamed that you were suffering. I am the one to beg for pardon——"

"It—it is almost worth while to go through all that I have of late," she said mistily, "only to feel the relief and blissfulness of this——"

"Haven't you gone upstairs yet, Margaret?" Grey demanded in surprise; "you'll not get any beauty sleep to-night, young woman."

"Yes, I shall, Don," with a swift glance at her husband, "yes—I—shall."

Later, when the two men were peacefully smoking, Grey broke a rather lengthy silence. "I have been thinking of your position on that Michael affair. Someway, I can't get it out of my head. You're wrong, Sydney, speaking on general principles, dead wrong. It might have been better, perhaps, for Michaels to have kept silent, but as a rule I believe in frankness. 'Open confession is good for the soul.'"

"Not always, Don——"

"Now, see here, Syd, can you imagine anything occurring between you and Peggy which would not be clearer and better for you both after a frank confession?"

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There was no reply. Latimore smoked on in silence. "Can't conjure up any such instance, can you?" Grey demanded. "I knew that you couldn't. I tell you that openness, frankness——"

"Yes, I have thought of a possible instance," Latimore interrupted; "give a fellow time to exercise his—his imagination, will you? We were speaking of Mrs. Van Gorder this afternoon. After you left the room just now I found that Margaret had been a wee bit jealous of her——"

"Do you know I surmised as much?" Grey's laugh was hearty. "Well?"

"She's satisfied now that there isn't any other woman in the world for me—and that there never will be——"

"I know that, old man——"

"But—I'd like to prove my point. Suppose for a moment that she really had had grounds for her jealousy. Suppose that I had been shallow and weak enough to have been caught by Lucia Van Gorder's flatteries and wiles; suppose that I had gone there willingly every day, had drifted into a tempestuous, absorbing passion—that the visits meant everything to me—that I had kept the dates of our talks not for professional reasons, but as a lover might——"

"Can't suppose anything of the kind, Syd——"

"Just such things have happened, Don, with men situated exactly as I am. Suppose that I lived barely from day to day on the thought of seeing her—never looked the future squarely in the face——"

"And all of this time—some months am I to presume it to be?—Peggy is unsuspecting?—or at the most only a bit jealous of your frequent calls?"

"Yes, suppose just that. Then imagine that some day I find the door open and walk toward her sitting-room without the formality of ringing; I hear voices

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and stop. She is telling some intimate feminine friend what a delightful fool she is making of me just in order to kill time until she can lighten her mourning and go into society——”

Grey laughed good naturedly. “I never supposed that you were endowed with so much imagination. Well, after overhearing such a complimentary commentary, I conclude that you would walk in and overwhelm them with your scorn——”

“N-o—I think not—no-o. No-o-o, hardly that. The fact would still remain then that I had been her fool and puppet.”

“What would you do?”

“We-l-l, get out of the house as quietly as possible, I think, and make my visits as usual until I thought of some way of getting even—some way that would teach her a lesson and humble her pride, and that”—his teeth closed viciously on his cigar—“that would not permit her to look on me as her victim.”

“Easier said than done, I fancy—what could you do?”

There was no reply for some seconds. Grey watched his companion with keen amusement in his eyes.

“I—I think that I would send her an itemized bill putting in the date of each call—and I would double my usual charges——”

Grey’s merriment rolled forth in an uproarious burst of laughter. “You’d be even with a vengeance—and then?”

“Well—and then—what would be the use of telling Peggy? It would cut her to the soul. I would have had my lesson for all time, but she would never believe it. It might be a relief to me to tell her the poor little story—but I would be a cad to do it, Don—for she would never trust me again, with the same pure faith——”

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"No, I presume not," Grey admitted; "Peggy has ideals, and her husband must live up to them."

"You see that I could not tell her—but I could make her so sure of my love that she would never doubt me again under any circumstances. If—if—I had to confess I could do it more easily to you, Don."

Grey started and whirled in his chair. He looked steadily at his friend, but Latimore's gaze was following the circling rings of smoke.



HIS CALLING

HIS CALLING

"And as I was the only one free to come and go, I packed up and dropped down on you last evening. We haven't seen Shirley since you carried her off two years ago. We think a heap of her, Nelson, and it has been mighty hard to have her thousands of miles away."

"I know it, Lucretia, and I could hardly wonder if you all detested me."

"Now, Nelson, we'd not be apt to dislike any one just because he had the good taste to fall in love with our girl, but we certainly kept getting lonesomer and lonesomer, until at last, as I was saying, I just started off. I'm the only one of the whole bunch, you see, free to do as I choose——"

"And the only one, too, dear, of all the Freundschaft with shekels enough to follow out her fancies," supplemented Shirley, with a sudden catch in her voice.

"There's something in that, of course, but I'd have brought your mother, child, if she could have been persuaded to leave home——"

"You're a darling even to think of it. It was dear of you, Lucretia, but she could hardly leave father and the boys——" There was a nervous tension in Shirley's voice apparent to both listeners.

Miss Randolph looked suddenly penitent. "I don't believe in surprises, I like to know when folks are coming to see me, and I don't thank any one for appearing

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unexpected like. Yet, here I've gone and done that very thing myself. Now you feel all upset and——"

"Don't imagine that we are not both overjoyed," the minister interposed. "Shirley has missed her home people more than she let me know. We are simply delighted to see you. We'd like to make you a permanent fixture here!"

There was no doubting the sincerity of his tone. Yet Lucretia looked at her young cousin uneasily. Shirley's love for her was too fundamental a fact to be questioned, and of course the child must be glad to see her! Shirley's eyes were remarkably truthful, and Lucretia had seen delight in them last evening. Had she, possibly, seen something else, also, which she could not translate?

"I don't care what you say, Nelson, I—I feel like a heathen. Shirley is unstrung and it is my fault. Surprises are something like rubber balls; they bound back when you least expect them sometimes. I'll never do such an idiotic thing again."

"Don't reproach yourself, Lucretia," Nelson Dinsmore said imperiously; "the sight of a home face after two years' absence is rather upsetting, but a tearful greeting is sure to be heartfelt. I never imagined that it would be so impossible for Shirley to return home frequently, but travel is expensive at best, and somehow there are endless demands upon a minister's purse."

"Your salary is good, Nelson?"

"Only fair;" the tone was curt, "two thousand a year seemed big to me when I was starting back home on twelve hundred, but it is absolutely nothing here. They don't even give us the house."

Miss Randolph's eyes swept scrutinizingly over the tasteful room. She realized that there was not a single article in it of value, yet it would not have been pos-

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sible for her to have achieved as satisfactory results even with a very liberal expenditure. Shirley had contrived to stamp her own individuality upon the place. There were no quarrelsome colors to annoy one's finer sense. It was all harmonious and charming.

Dinsmore's eyes followed those of his guest. "Oh, the place looks very well, Lucretia; my wife is a marvel, you know. She can make a dollar go further than any one else. Some day I hope that she'll have more to do with. Next spring we go to Brooklyn." There was a note of quiet pride in his voice; "the arrangements have all been made, but I cannot get away from here until spring. The church there will wait."

"It will be better for you—financially?"

"Three thousand a year and a handsome parsonage. That is not much for Brooklyn. It is a sort of tentative offer. I am promised on the side that if I make good it will be at least five thousand by another year. I hope it may for Shirley's sake." He rose suddenly; despite her scorn of everything masculine, Lucretia surveyed his tall, well-knit figure with lively admiration. If Shirley must have a husband, it was a mercy that he was a good-looking creature.

"I must go to my writing now. Shirley sees that I am never interrupted from breakfast-time until noon. It is quite essential that I have a few hours a day absolutely undisturbed. He stooped and kissed his wife.

To Miss Randolph, watching with keen gaze, Shirley seemed oddly indifferent to the caress. Two years ago she had flushed and palpitated at the mere sound of Nelson's footstep.

Lucretia mentally called herself an idiot for expecting the wife to act like the girl. Yet there had been an elusive something in Shirley's rather infrequent letters, which Lucretia's quick affection had detected and

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which had sent her scurrying across the continent in a manner entirely at variance with all her cast-iron principles of action.

She had schemed to take her cousin by surprise, yet she did not know what she had expected to find.

The girl seemed well enough, although far from strong; her husband was evidently the lover still, and Lucretia suddenly felt that she had come on a fool's errand.

"You precious, homesick mortal," she said tenderly, as the door closed after the minister; "you were up at a most unearthly hour this morning. You have done a full day's work already, I'll warrant, and now I want you to rest. Lie down on the couch. See! I'll draw the shades and then we can talk quietly. Do, dear!"

"Lie down?" The words had a hysterical sound; "Lucretia, you plainly don't know what it means to be a minister's wife. There are exactly ten thousand things waiting to be done. I believe that the mending is about the most imperative thing just now. We can visit as I work. I only pray that we may have a little time to ourselves."

"If you really must attack that awful mountain of stuff, Shirley, I'll help. No! you needn't say a word. I'd be apt to sit still with my hands folded, wouldn't I, while you were stitching away? Besides," as an evident afterthought, "I like to sew."

"You are a lovely fraud, Lucretia, with your sudden mania for sewing—but you don't know what awful things you are undertaking here."

"I'll soon find out;" Lucretia's lips shut grimly. "Give me that table-cloth." She unfolded it with a little exclamation of dismay. "It is nothing but an aggregation of holes, dearie, I'll just tear it up for old linen——"

"Don't you dare!" Shirley's eyes were dancing, but

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she shook a threatening finger at her cousin; "that is my best table cloth; it has not yet fallen into 'innocuous desuetude'!"

"Shirley Dinsmore, are you in earnest? Do you actually want me to darn it?"

The girl's momentary gayety vanished. "No, I'll do it, Lucretia," she said drearily; "there is no conceivable reason why you should attempt such a task. It is worse than the labors of Hercules, isn't it? Talk about money being the root of all evil! To my mind it is the lack of money which is responsible for most of the miseries in this world."

Lucretia's fingers flew fast, keeping pace with her thoughts. Dared she question? Yet she had come to find out the truth—whatever that was! "Is living so much higher here than with us, dear?" she inquired casually. "Two thousand a year isn't an enormous amount, but it does seem as if you might indulge in a piece of new table-linen occasionally."

"If Nelson were anything but a minister, our money would reach. Now there are so many demands which he feels that he must meet. There are books which he must buy to keep up with his work; he is expected to give liberally to every cause that comes along; then we entertain a host of people; a minister's house is a sort of hotel where one is not called upon to pay any bills. Nelson dresses well—a minister doesn't like to look shabby—and he is often obliged to attend meetings in other cities——"

"Well, neither one of us is going to darn this cloth." The older woman tore it up with vindictive energy. "I didn't give you any birthday present this year and ——" But Lucretia was stopped in the midst of her assertion by Shirley, who declared: "Lucretia! don't imagine that you can play the fairy godmother here; it would take too deep a purse!"

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"Don't bother your head about my purse, Shirley Dinsmore! I came here to have a good time, and I intend to have it in my own way!"

"As if I didn't know what that way was! You are the most generous soul that ever lived. Someway, Lucretia, I don't seem to mind your getting behind the scenes, though I couldn't stand it to have any one else do so. I'm really glad that mother did not come with you—though I am often just heartsick for her."

"You don't mind my being here?" Lucretia asked it pleadingly; "if I am a trouble——"

"I couldn't stand any one else, but I am honestly glad that you came."

"You have been staying in the dark with your ghosts too much, Shirley, just as you used to do when you were a youngster. Bring them out into the sunlight where we can both see them. Ghosts always shrivel into nothingness when a real ray of sunshine strikes them."

"Your philosophy is as sound as ever, dear, but I have no ghosts to fight, nothing but stubborn facts. Don't waste time over me! How does the old place look?"

A lack of dollars and cents was not the child's greatest trouble, Lucretia decided swiftly; and yet——

Her brain puzzled over the problem even while she was cheerily retailing all the precious bits of home gossip.

Lucretia was a good waiter, and she would force no confidence. Surely the child would soon tell her everything.

The door bell rang as the stream of talk was at flood tide. Shirley dropped her work despairingly. "It is really odd that they have left me in peace as long as this. I don't know when I have had an uninterrupted hour before——"

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"I trust that you don't call our talk uninterrupted," Lucretia said tartly. "You have answered the telephone some twenty times, either to give advice or to promise aid in some enterprise. Does the church pay you a salary?"

"Nelson cannot be disturbed," Mrs. Dinsmore returned quietly, "and the people have come to rely upon me to a certain extent. It touches me and I am glad of it in a way. Yet there are limits to physical endurance. . . . Yes, Jane," as the small maid announced the caller; "I'll go to the parlor at once. Will you come, Lucretia? Mrs. Gordon is a selfish bore—but——"

"The mending basket promises more attractions, I think." Lucretia's tone was dry.

"Oh, dear!" Shirley paused with her hand on the knob; "I wish that I might exercise the prerogative of other women, and be excused if I am busy, or tired, or have a headache——"

"Why can't you?"

"My dear Lucretia! every one of the women would be furious and take it as a personal insult. I am not supposed to have any individuality! I must listen to every one's troubles when the rolls are burning in the oven, and every bone in my body is aching. I am so deadly weary sometimes that it is strange I do not fall asleep—but I do love most of them and want to help where I can." Then the door closed.

Lucretia worked rapidly, though her competent fingers tore up quite as many articles as they mended. She did not like to feel baffled and she knew that some thread of the truth was slipping past her.

The omniverous basket was empty at last, and she suddenly decided to go downtown and replace the garments which she had destroyed.

Shirley, looking out of the parlor window, watched her enviously as she walked briskly down the street.

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She would have enjoyed going with Lucretia, herself. Would Mrs. Gordon never leave? It would soon be lunch-time, and the half-grown girl in the kitchen was equal to nothing beyond the mere washing of the dishes.

Three-quarters of an hour later, Miss Randolph returned to find her cousin entertaining some later arrivals.

She walked directly to the kitchen, feeling that she had "better bear a hand."

When Shirley was finally liberated, she hurried to the dining room. On the threshold she paused. "Lucretia!" her voice broke a little, "you blessed soul! You must not spoil me. I have learned to depend upon myself and now—and now—if you act like this—what shall I ever—ever—do when you go back home?"

"I've done a lot, now, haven't I?"

"That table cloth—those napkins—they are beauties!"

"My birthday present to you."

"Those roses——"

"Only three of them. I bought those for myself, but you'll be allowed to look at them if you are good——"

"And you must have been at the Exchange, Lucretia! those rolls and that salad——"

"I just wanted to find out if they really were as good as they looked to be. Now, child, stop your fussing at me and call your husband."

At least two of the three people present considered the luncheon a success. Miss Randolph was well satisfied with her morning's work, and the minister showed his appreciation of her efforts in a practical fashion which delighted her soul. He was a good talker, and as he was honestly desirous of pleasing his guest, he naturally succeeded. Lucretia was by no means intellectual, but Dinsmore was careful not to get beyond

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her depth, and she found herself listening to his theories and arguments with unexpected zest.

"It seems jolly to get out here with you two after grinding away all morning," he remarked finally. "I thought of you several times with actual envy. You have had a good time visiting, I expect."

Lucretia waited for her cousin to reply, but as Shirley remained silent, she seized the chance for freeing her mind. "I can't see that you had much reason to envy us. Shirley has been working, answering telephone calls and trying to lighten the burdens of half your flock. Haven't any of them enough moral backbone so that they can stand up without leaning against her?"

Dinsmore frowned. "They all adore Shirley, which is not to be wondered at, but they are a woefully dependent lot of mortals. I am sorry that they did not let you alone to-day, at least."

"Nelson," quite ignoring his remarks—"Mr. Brownley telephoned this morning about the library subscription."

"Oh, yes! a new library for the Sunday School, Lucretia. We need it badly, and I have been agitating the matter ever since I came. I suppose that they want me to help start the paper off. I'll have to give twenty-five dollars, I suppose; I can't very well give more——"

Lucretia glanced sharply at her cousin. Surely Nelson must notice the silent protest of his wife's attitude. Why didn't Shirley say something? She had to bite her own lips to keep back some hot comments.

But the minister, apparently, felt nothing electrical in the domestic atmosphere and the talk drifted to other subjects.

Shortly after luncheon Dinsmore glanced into the library where his wife and her cousin were bringing

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order out of the chaos which he daily created there.

"Shirley, dear, I've brought Alden in to meet our guest. Miss Randolph let me introduce Mr. Brewster. I don't know how we should ever manage to get along without him!"

Lucretia felt her hand taken in a hearty, cordial grasp. "Awfully glad to meet you! I know just how delighted Mrs. Dinsmore must be to see a home face. You must let me do the honors of the place while you are here. By the way, can't I take you both out now for a couple of hours in my car?"

"I'd like to go very much," Lucretia lied with great promptitude; she feared and hated an automobile more than anything else on earth, but the change would be good for Shirley——

"It is kind of you, Alden, to invite us. Lucretia will enjoy the ride, I know, but I can't go," said the minister's wife.

"I'm not stirring a step unless you go, too, Shirley. I didn't come all this distance to go galivanting off without you," declared Lucretia.

"Why can't you go, dear?" Dinsmore was asking.

His wife looked at him quietly. "Have you forgotten the elders whom you invited to dine here to-night?"

"Upon my word, Shirley, I had. I'm dreadfully sorry, dearest. I hope that we may be able to afford a chef some day who will take all of this drudgery off of your shoulders. You had better go, anyway, Lucretia, it is an ideal day for motoring."

"I'm not going without Shirley," she reiterated stubbornly. In Brewster's eyes she caught a warmly approving flash. "We'll both go, Shirley. I'll stop at the Exchange," she added, in a lower tone, "and leave an order which will make the dinner easy. I want to do this, so don't you say a word."

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"I'm glad if you can arrange it," Dinsmore said heartily; "come into my den for just a moment, will you now, dear? I need your advice about a little matter." As the minister and his wife passed from the room, Brewster turned quickly to Lucretia. "You're no end of a trump, Miss Randolph, to insist upon her going. Mrs. Dinsmore is the mere shadow of what she was two years ago."

"What's the matter?" The question was eager, imperative, decisive.

"That's hard to tell, and I can't even say to you all that I believe to be true. Dinsmore is all right intellectually; he has filled the church to overflowing. His sermons are strong, genuine, brilliant. I don't suppose that he realizes for a moment that the people here have come to depend for spiritual aid and comfort and sympathy, more upon his wife than upon him. That's a fact, though."

"You mean?"

"That Mrs. Dinsmore supplements her husband's work at every turn. He would be lost without her. He enjoys the intellectual part of his duties, but he shrinks from hearing tales of woe. He hardly knows how to soothe and minister to the grief-stricken. And—someway—the whole lot of them here have turned to Mrs. Dinsmore just as naturally as the flowers turn to the sun. There's nothing odd about it—except that he should let all the sick and forlorn and depressed dump their burdens down upon her weak shoulders—as if" (under his breath) "she didn't have burdens enough of her own to carry."

"Burdens of her—own?" Lucretia repeated the words almost stupidly.

Brewster looked at her keenly. "I'm not going to say another word. You are on the spot and you have a pair of remarkably keen-sighted eyes in your head—

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Now, Mrs. Dinsmore," as Shirley reappeared, "get on your hat at once; we must not lose a moment of this glorious afternoon."

Lucretia Randolph had always been inordinately proud of her powers of penetration. Now, however, they failed her. At the end of six weeks she had received no further confidences from her cousin. Yet she had been so sure that Shirley could hide nothing from her!

True, she saw more deeply each day into the rigid economies of her cousin. Despite Shirley's vehement protests, she spent with a lavish hand until at last something like comfort and plenty reigned in every corner of the house—except in that particular corner which housed Shirley's personal belongings.

With all her boldness, Lucretia had not ventured to intrude there. It hurt her terribly, though, to have Shirley appear in shabby gowns. Didn't the child really have anything fit to wear?

And then Shirley was always so busy! Lucretia tried to relieve her, but there seemed to be so many things which only Shirley could do! Almost their only opportunity for uninterrupted visiting was in Alden Brewster's motor car. He appeared frequently with his breezy, imperious invitations—and they always went. Shirley, because otherwise her cousin would not go; Lucretia, because she felt that Shirley needed the outings.

Of late, however, the older woman had grown frightened. Brewster understood Shirley too well by far. It was dangerous. She liked the frank, whole-souled young fellow much better than she did Dinsmore. He had an almost feminine perception and insight, and Shirley's lot would have been still more arduous but for his thoughtfulness. Still—Lucretia shook her head! No one had a right to protect and guard Shir-

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ley except Nelson. Miss Randolph was old-fashioned.

"Shirley," Lucretia spoke a trifle hesitatingly; for some time it had seemed to her that a crisis would come soon. How it would come, or what it would signify, she could not guess. But she knew Shirley too well not to detect the dangerous condition of the atmosphere—quiet as everything was. Was Nelson both blind and stupid?

The subject of her cousin's dress was rather a forbidden topic, yet something must be said! "Shirley, what gown are you going to wear to Mrs. Olcott's dinner?"

"My gray."

"Your gray! Shirley Dinsmore, you had that before you were married, and——"

"Very true, most sapient cousin. You might also add that it is old-fashioned and shabby. Nevertheless, I shall wear it."

"But why, Shirley? Why?"

"For the all-sufficient reason that I possess nothing better."

"Why don't you, then?" Lucretia demanded hotly; "Nelson dresses well. For land's sakes, child, why don't you tell him that you have nothing but rags in your wardrobe?"

"Tell him?" Lucretia recoiled at the vivid anger in the girl's tone. "Never!"

"But why, dear," she persisted, feeling that at last she was on the verge of that discovery which she had sought. "Nelson is your husband. Men are always careless about things, but of course he loves you——"

"Nelson Dinsmore loves no one but himself!" the accusation came fiercely.

"He—he is a minister, Shirley——" Lucretia was shocked.

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"Why is he a minister? Not because of any spiritual calling to the work. Nelson was ambitious and poor. He took up theology as he might have taken up law or medicine or electricity! He saw in the pulpit the best scope for his talents. Plenty of men do that sort of thing. But I—I am old-fashioned enough to believe that a minister ought to be 'called'—at least he ought not to exploit theology from exactly the same motives that another man exploits some patent medicine! It makes religion a farce!"

"Don't be hard, dear! and—and I know that he does love you!"

"Then I care little for that kind of love, Lucretia," the younger woman flung forth passionately. "What do you—what do I—mean by love? What does any true man or woman mean by it? Love means thoughtfulness, tenderness, consideration, unselfishness, protection, sympathy. If it doesn't possess all of these things, it is a mere travesty, and you know it, Lucretia Randolph, as well as I!"

"But Nelson——" Lucretia commenced feebly.

"Nelson!" Shirley poured forth her words with a hot anger that scorched the dazed listener. "Nelson has taken me away from my home. I am in the midst of strangers. Have I had consideration from him? Have I not carried his burdens and my own? I must stand between him and all manner of petty annoyances! Does he ever shield me? You know that he is selfish. He spends his money freely for his own personal gratification—for dress, and books, and travel. Do I find sympathy or protection or thoughtfulness in him? Why, there have been times——"

"Now listen to me, Shirley! Nelson is not so self-centered that he cannot see the truth if it is put before him. I want you to have a talk——"

"No!" Lucretia perceived the finality in the tone.

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"Oh, my dear! I wish that you were married so that you could get my viewpoint! The clothes or the work, or the hardships are not the vital things! What hurts is that he never notices that my gowns are disgraceful and that I am overworked every day. Yet, Nelson is not a careless man! He takes in details better than most of his sex! Lucretia, I waited for months and months after we settled here, sure that his eyes would open some day. Poor little fool that I was, I expected him to sweep me into his arms some morning—to tell me that he had been blind and careless and selfish; that he intended to take better care of me in the future; that I should have a competent maid in the kitchen; some new dresses to wear, and that he would shield me hereafter—not I him! I was so sure that just this very thing would happen some day, Lucretia—so sure!"

The scalding tears hurt Lucretia's eyes. The poor darling! Did faith always receive such a niggardly return?

"Dearest, go to Nelson now; tell him what you have told me, word for word. I promise that the very thing will happen that you wish!" She spoke valiantly, though her faith in Nelson Dinsmore at that moment was at very low ebb.

Shirley shook her head. "I knew that I could not make you see! I have not been fighting and waiting for new gowns or an easier life. I have been longing for the resurrection of a dead hope. What I would get from him by demanding my wifely rights would mean less than nothing. I want him to see without my speaking; to sympathize and protect and—cherish."

"Shirley, dear, in the nature of things this cannot go on forever. Look at the practical view a moment. Your gowns will some day fall to pieces—they are near enough to doing it now."

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"No," there was a hard tone in the vibrant voice; "it cannot go on forever."

"I said so!" there was a note of relief in the words; "you simply must talk the matter out with Nelson."

"I shall never do that. I will simply endure as long as I can——"

"And then?" Lucretia was frightened.

"I don't know yet. There are several things that I might do—women—in my circumstances generally have more than one path open to them——"

It seemed to Miss Randolph that a blinding flash of light had paralyzed her—Alden Brewster?—Shirley.

She reached out her arms blindly. "Come to me, dear, and remember that you love your husband. You do!"

"Love Nelson? I loathe him! I feel as if I should scream whenever his lips touch me. Love him——?" The voice choked and broke, and Shirley was crying with the pent-up passion of her outraged, slighted womanhood.

At dusk that evening, Miss Randolph sought the minister. She invaded his den with the one paramount purpose of "freeing her mind."

Yet, inexplicably, her intention altered.

"Nelson, I must be leaving in a few days. I've been here more than six weeks as it is——"

"Leaving? I—I—hoped——"

Lucretia started. What ailed the man?

"Yes, I leave for New York on Wednesday and I want to take Shirley——"

"Wednesday? Shirley? We are going to entertain——" He stopped abruptly. "Thank you. She needs a change, and a few days in New York will do her good."

"You didn't let me finish, Nelson. I am going on

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to Europe and I want to take your wife along. I shall probably be gone about a year."

A tense silence followed. It was very dark in the small room, and Lucretia could not read the expression on the man's face. His head was turned partly away from her. He seemed to be looking out of the window at the blinding storm that beat against the pane.

The silence had grown almost unendurable before he spoke.

Lucretia wondered at herself. Why didn't she say some of those bitter home-truths which she had come prepared to fling at him?

Something broke the silence at last. His voice was almost unrecognizable. "You took me by surprise. But, I—it is the best plan, I think. I—I must thank you."

It was fully a year later that Lucretia and her cousin sat in their apartments at Munich, surrounded by trunks and valises.

"And we shall be starting back next week!"

"Yes, and I just suppose that when we got home again all of our good times over here will seem like a dream. We have had a good time, haven't we, Shirley?" The question was wistful.

"The best ever," the girl responded promptly.

"And you are looking well and as pretty as a picture—and your voice! Shirley, I never supposed that any one could sing like you!"

"Thousands of people sing much better—but I am glad that I can do something. The money that you squandered on those lessons, Lucretia——"

"I wanted to do it, and you promised never to say anything about the matter again."

"All right!" Mrs. Dinsmore looked affectionately at her cousin's homely, wholesome face. "Lucretia,"

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she added, after a moment, "I—I had another letter from Nelson this morning. It contained a check."

"He has been very liberal since we came abroad, Shirley."

"Yes—but it is too late. I have not spent a cent of his money. Did—did—you say anything, dear, that might have made him send it?"

"On my word of honor, not a single syllable!" Miss Randolph's tone was emphatic. "I—I meant to that night, you know—but somehow I couldn't."

"That's funny, Lucretia."

"Yes, it is, for I'm not generally at a loss for words—but you'd have felt the same. Shirley—I—I haven't said much this year, but—but I hope that things will be all right now between you and Nelson."

Shirley's lips tightened. "I have no definite plans. I am going home first—home with you to father and mother and the boys. I must see them. After that I do not know. There is my voice now—thanks to you; I need not starve."

"Shirley, husband and wife should be together."

"Not always, Lucretia—and I am not at all sure that Nelson is making good in Brooklyn. He says very little about his work."

Miss Randolph started to say something, then shut her lips. There were times when it was worse than useless to argue with Shirley.

"If you can finish the packing, dear, I'll go out now and get those gloves."

"I wish you would, Lucretia—and—and—by the way, I had another letter besides Nelson's this morning."

"Yes?" she tried in vain to make the word sound pleasant. Alden Brewster had no right to write to a married woman!

"Why do you dislike Alden so, Lucretia? "Anyway,"

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wearily, "I'll probably not hear from him again. He's—he's engaged."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"I suppose you are, dear, and yet I have lost my best friend, except yourself."

"There's Nelson——"

"Don't——" there was repugnance in voice and gesture. Lucretia sighed. After all, had she accomplished any lasting good by bringing Shirley away? She went out to her shopping with a very heavy heart.

Shirley, left behind, gazed listlessly out of the window. What had she to look forward to?

The door opened softly and she turned to encounter her husband's eyes.

"Nelson!"

"Yes, dear!" making no movement toward her; "I felt there were some things that must be settled between us before you came home. They could not be written. So I came."

Shirley clutched the back of a chair and stared at him, her heart throbbing in her ears and threatening to burst its bounds.

"I—I heard what you said to Lucretia that afternoon, Shirley. It was true, every word of the awful indictment and—and you said that you loathed me—No! there are just a few things that I must say now, don't stop me, dear! I have failed as husband and as minister. I—think that I may have done better work this last year—I have suffered enough to understand suffering——"

"Nelson——"

"Don't blame yourself, Shirley. I had no right to enter the ministry. I did it as a business enterprise."

"But now, Nelson——"

"Yes, now, I have gotten nearer to the heart of things, but I have no right in the pulpit. I have been

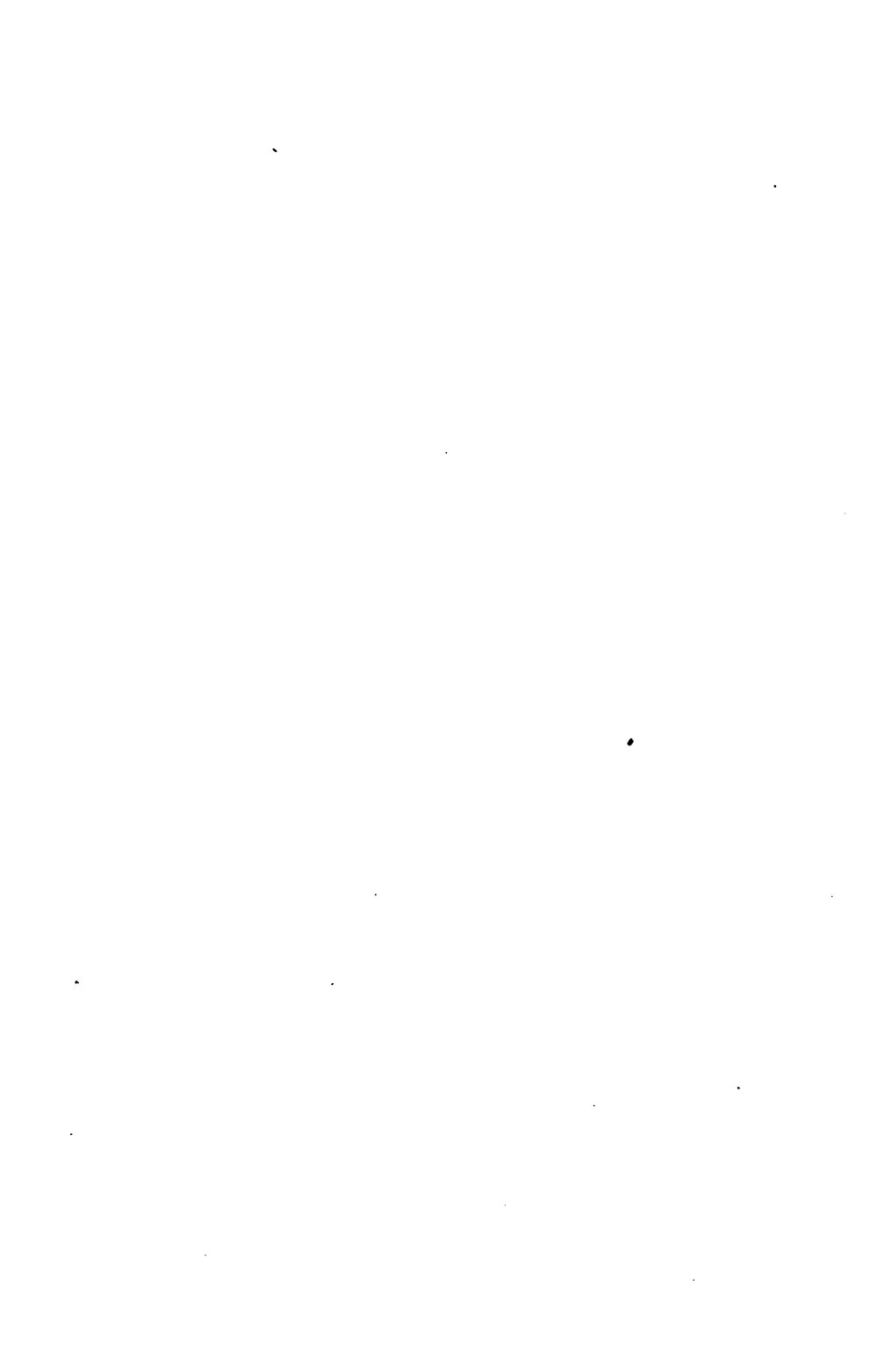
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offered a college professorship, dear—and I have accepted. As great a failure as I should not teach others—and Shirley—of course you do not feel that life with me would be tolerable. I have tried to think things out—— Would you like to stay here a couple of years longer and study music? Whatever you want——”

“I want——” the tears were pouring down Shirley’s cheeks; “I—I want you to unclasp your arms and put them around me—and oh, Nelson, I have missed you so—I have missed you so!”

The wondering, amazed, awe-struck look on the man’s face was indescribable.

THE HAWORTH TRAGEDY



THE HAWORTH TRAGEDY

The terse announcement in all of the daily papers of Vanderling Haworth's marriage caused a profound sensation.

"Virginia Simpkins, daughter of Judas Simpkins, of Lodac," Johnny Grosvenor repeated to himself for the thousandth time; "who is the girl and where is the place? I must find out or my sisters will perish of unsatisfied curiosity."

Being possessed of abundant leisure and a bull-headed persistence, Grosvenor succeeded at length in unearthing several pertinent items of information. These he speedily imparted to the habitués of his favorite club.

"Lodac is not a village at all; no wonder that we could not find it on any map. It is merely the name of a small inn among the mountains that hunters patronize. The proprietor of the inn is named Simpkins, and this girl is evidently his daughter. I cannot understand the affair at all," Grosvenor said emphatically. "If Van had ever been wild, one could guess at a solution of the mystery, but he has been puritanical in his morals; it floors me."

"I thought," remarked one of his hearers, "that Haworth was desperately smitten with your cousin, Miss Fairfax; I fully expected to receive their cards soon."

"So did I," said Johnny ruefully.

"The matter is plain enough," a third man interposed brusquely; "Miss Fairfax jilted Van and he went off in a rage and married this creature."

That was the version of the story which, for lack of

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a better, society at length accepted. Grosvenor, however, recalling the farewell which had passed between Constance and Haworth as Van was starting off on his regular hunting expedition, thought differently. The parting, despite the presence of himself and George Fairfax, had been most cordial, and, on Van's part, at least, it had been decidedly loverlike. Haworth had then promised to be home in time for Constance's birthday dance; but instead of doing so he was on the ocean taking his bride to Europe. The fact of his departure only transpired when the list of passengers appeared in the papers some hours after the steamer had sailed. It was not strange that Johnny Grosvenor's poor little brain was in a whirl.

What Constance Fairfax thought, not even her brother could determine. She was a little colder and a little haughtier than usual when Van's marriage was the theme of conversation. That was all. She, herself, had positively declined to discuss the matter.

The marriage itself, had almost ceased to be a topic of interest when the bustle around the Haworth home made it probable that the travelers would soon return.

Haworth had written to no one during his absence and the chance meeting of himself and George Fairfax at their club soon after his return was naturally rather strained and cool. The two friends seemed hopelessly estranged.

Society held aloof from the bride, uncertain as to its course.

It was at this crisis that Constance Fairfax astounded her brother one morning by the calm announcement that she intended to call on Mrs. Haworth that day. "Will you go with me?"

"Certainly not," he returned hotly; "Haworth has treated us too shabily; I can't fathom your motive in wishing to go."

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Miss Fairfax flushed slightly; she was influenced by several motives which she had no intention of revealing even to her brother.

"I dislike to see a woman treated badly," she said lightly. "Society is only waiting for some one to take the initiative. We have always been on such friendly terms with Van that we are surely the proper persons to come forward now. I do not expect to see much of Mrs. Haworth hereafter, but I shall not stop until our old set has accepted her."

Fairfax looked dissatisfied. "You must gang your own gait, Connie, but I wish that you would stay at home."

There came a time when Constance Fairfax would have given ten years of her life had she followed her brother's advice.

That evening George Fairfax looked at his sister in amazement. There was a faint color in her cheeks, a softer light in her eyes, and the suggestion of a smile hovered continually around her lips.

"Did you make your call, Connie?" he queried curiously.

"No—yes—that is, I went," she answered cohesively.

Fairfax stared. It was something new to see his sister embarrassed.

Before he could question her further she had slipped from the room.

At eleven o'clock that night, Fairfax saw her again, but the change in her face was so great as to be appalling. Her features were set and colorless, her lips tense and drawn. She looked at him with unseeing eyes and tore herself from his detaining hand.

In the morning, Fairfax hurried to the breakfast room, trying to persuade himself that the vision of the previous night was some frightful dream.

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Constance was already at the table, her face wan and haggard. Her brother noted with surprise that the morning papers lay untouched.

Mechanically he picked them up with some cheery words of greeting, then stopped short in unspeakable horror.

Miss Fairfax shivered as if about to receive some impending blow.

"Look, Constance," he said, in a hoarse whisper; "this is terrible," and he held the paper toward her with a shaking hand.

With lips as colorless as her cheeks, she turned and saw in flaming headlines:

MURDER!

MRS. VANDERLING HAWORTH MURDERED IN HER OWN HOME.

A Most Mysterious Crime—The Police at Work on the Case—Coroner's Inquest To-day.

Miss Fairfax forced herself to read thus far; then her eye glanced like lightning over the three columns of leaded type devoted to a detailed account of the Haworth family, including a history of Van's marriage and the discovery of the murdered woman by a servant.

Suddenly her head sank into her hands. Her brother went to her side in quick alarm, but she repulsed him. "Don't be afraid that I shall faint. I am all right."

"Are you sure, Constance?" he queried anxiously. "I was a brute to show you that paper so suddenly, but I seemed bereft of reason. I'll go to Van if you do not need me."

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"You are going to him, George?"

"Certainly, I only wish that I had gone yesterday with you."

"I wish to heaven that you had," she cried passionately.

"At least I can go to-day, and at once; I couldn't touch a morsel of food. Good-by, dear," and Fairfax hurried to Haworth's home, which was on the same street and only a few squares distant.

The coroner and police seemed to be in possession of the premises, but in the hallway Fairfax met a private detective whom he knew. He stopped to question him briefly.

"It was half past eleven, sir," said the detective, "when the housekeeper, who was closing up for the night, entered the little library off the drawing room and found Mrs. Haworth lying on the couch dead."

Fairfax shuddered. "It is too horrible to believe. I did not stop to read the particulars. Perhaps you had better tell me all you can before I see Mr. Haworth."

"There is precious little to tell. The murder was done with a sharp Venetian dagger that the maid said belonged to Mrs. Haworth and was usually lying on the mantel."

"Could it have been suicide?"

The detective shook his head. "No, there have been half a dozen physicians here examining the wound on that theory, but it don't hold. The blow came from behind, and was aimed in such a way that it could not possibly have been inflicted by the dead woman. The wound is a peculiar one in any case, though," he concluded ruminatively.

"Have you any clue as yet? Who were here last night? What do the servants say?" queried Fairfax abruptly.

"Mrs. Haworth's maid says that she started to enter

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her mistress' room about eight o'clock last evening, but stopped because she heard angry voices. She was amazed because she never heard Mr. Haworth speak angrily before, but she declares that he threatened his wife last night."

Fairfax frowned. "That is a servant's lie, Randolph. Great heavens, you don't take any stock in it?"

"I don't know, sir. Well, after that the butler saw Mrs. Haworth enter the library, and about half past ten a lady heavily veiled came in and sent a note to Mr. Haworth. She waited in the drawing room while the note was delivered; after three or four minutes the butler returned with Mr. Haworth's reply, and the woman met him at the drawing-room door. He handed her the note and she left. No one saw her face or recognized her."

"She undoubtedly committed the crime," Fairfax said decisively. "You are working on this case, Randolph?"

The detective looked a trifle perturbed. "I happened to be going past last evening when the housekeeper found Mrs. Haworth's dead body, and I rushed in as she screamed for help. Since then the coroner has detained me, but Mr. Haworth's uncle, Judge Blackford, was here an hour ago, and he asked me to undertake the case."

"And you will?" Fairfax questioned eagerly.

"I am very busy," was the hesitating reply, "and Mr. Haworth himself may not wish me to undertake it. If you would speak to him——"

"Certainly," Fairfax returned promptly. "But of course he will wish you to go ahead. None of us have forgotten your clever work of two years ago at the time of the club robbery."

Randolph bowed and then slowly drew forth a tiny miniature. "I cannot as yet place this face, though it

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looks familiar to me. I fancy it may have played a part in the tragedy. I found it in the library, broken, and hidden in a bearskin rug. It could not have lain there long, for I found out casually from the maid that she had had the rug out of doors for cleaning yesterday morning. I must hand this to the coroner, but I actually forgot about it till this moment."

George Fairfax stretched out his hand for the tiny fragments, then dropped them as if stung by a scorpion, for the fair face looking at him from the bits of broken glass was that of his sister, Constance Fairfax.

Fairfax hesitated but a moment, then said sternly, "That is a picture of my sister, Randolph, as you would have soon learned for yourself. Your desire for some clue has misled you this time. I never saw the portrait before, and I cannot explain how it came in the library. Mr. Haworth undoubtedly can do so, and I will speak to him at once. Meanwhile I want your promise to keep this discovery to yourself. There can be no possible connection between the picture and the tragedy. If you handed this picture to the coroner, you would simply bring my sister into a distasteful notoriety while you would be hampering justice rather than aiding it."

Randolph's reply was slow in coming. "Well, sir, I have been under numerous obligations to you in the past and I am willing to do the best that I can to serve you now. If Mr. Haworth wishes me to undertake this case and will promise me his assistance, I can see no objection to withholding these facts for the present. At least, however, if I do not go on with the affair, I ought in all honesty to turn my knowledge over to the coroner."

"That will be all right," Fairfax said hastily. "I shall see you after the inquest and give you Mr. Haworth's authority to proceed in this matter. Good

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morning." Fairfax felt in a maze of doubt and dread as he mounted the broad stairway. Where had the miniature come from? How, in the name of all that was malicious, had it chanced to be at the very feet of the dead woman?

In the upper corridor he met Haworth's valet, who told him that his master was in his den. George pushed open the door without waiting to knock, then stopped aghast at the change in his friend.

The old sunny-faced, laughing, light-hearted man had vanished, and confronting him was a wan, haggard being.

As his glance fell on Fairfax, a gleam of the old-time gladness leaped to the surface.

"This is good of you, George," he cried, as their hands met in a strong, hearty clasp.

"Van, Van, how could you treat us so? Not a word! Not a line!"

Haworth groaned. "I forgot for a moment. 'Tis no use, George. You had better go."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Fairfax, seating himself; "there has been too much estrangement. Sit down. Now tell me, Van, why did you never write?"

"How could I? After my marriage what was there to say when you knew that I had hoped some day——" he stopped abruptly.

"Forgive the question, old fellow, but did you marry your wife willingly? voluntarily?"

"Voluntarily?—yes. Willingly?—no! a million times no!"

"I don't understand——" Fairfax began.

"Let it go. What difference does it make? She is dead and I would that I were, too."

"Stop that talk, Van, and be a man. There are years and years of honor and happiness before you.

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Let the past rest now. I want to aid you in this present trouble. Your uncle has asked Randolph to undertake this case, but, for some inscrutable reason, he feels that he ought to be engaged by you."

Haworth paled. "The regular police are at work. I see no use in engaging any one else."

"Randolph is an extraordinary man, and he can give all of his time and all of his energies to this case. Of course, the regular police will keep at work, but you must remember that they have scores of other cases on hand, too. Besides, Van, Randolph has run across an awkward bit of information that he will doubtless keep to himself if he is working for you, but which otherwise he must turn over to the police. In fact," abruptly, "he found a broken miniature of Constance in the library. Where did it come from, Van? Nothing will ever convince those bull-headed police that it has not some connection with your wife's death."

Haworth had sprung to his feet and was standing in front of his friend, the utmost consternation on his face. "It is all my cursed stupidity, George," he said finally; "I had the miniature made in Rome from the only photograph that your sister ever gave me."

"I hardly suppose that you, a married man, had my sister's portrait painted for-yourself?"

"Had nothing happened," Haworth returned with a subtle evasion that escaped his auditor, "I should have sent it to your house to-day."

"How did it happen to be on the library floor?"

"I was looking at it yesterday afternoon—I must have dropped and trodden on it. Some people came in and my attention was called to other things," Haworth said lamely, and with palpable effort.

"Have you no clue——" Fairfax commenced, when a knock on the door interrupted the conversation.

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Haworth was summoned to the formal inquest downstairs, and the two friends left the room together.

The inquiry was long and tedious, and not very fruitful in results.

Several physicians gave technical testimony as to the nature of the wound and all swore that it could not have been inflicted by the dead woman herself.

The crime had undoubtedly been committed with the Venetian dagger that was found on the floor near the body. The physicians had examined the body at midnight. The woman had been dead at least two hours then; possibly longer.

The butler's testimony came next. He swore that the small library in which Mrs. Haworth was found could be entered only by passing through the large drawing room. The drawing room itself had but two doors, the one leading into the library and the large double doors leading into the reception hall. All of the windows in both the library and drawing room had been carefully examined immediately after the discovery of the crime. All were securely fastened on the inside.

The obvious inference was that the assassin had entered the library from the reception hall and had passed on through the drawing room.

The butler went on to testify that there had been very few callers that day or indeed on any day since the Haworths' return.

A note had been left for Mrs. Haworth about two o'clock in the afternoon; he did not know from whom it came; it was brought by a young boy, not a messenger boy; he had not waited for any answer; later in the day Mrs. Haworth's brother had called and the two finally left the house together; Miss Fairfax had also called about that time. No one else had called until after seven o'clock dinner. At ten-thirty a lady

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heavily veiled had rung and sent a note to Mr. Haworth. She had waited in the drawing room for a reply; he had taken the note to Mr. Haworth himself, and had brought back the answer. The lady had met him at the drawing-room door. She left immediately on receiving the note. He did not see her face. She was not in the house more than three or four minutes. No one else had called. A little after eight, after he had eaten his own dinner, he had seated himself in a small room near the foot of the stairs. This room had been used by old Mr. Haworth as a sort of private office. He himself often sat there in the evenings when he was "on duty." The door stood open and he sat facing the front doors (which were always locked with a night latch) and the drawing-room doors. No one could have entered the drawing room without his knowledge.

Shortly after he had seated himself, Mrs. Haworth came downstairs and passed into the drawing room. She was alone. She had probably gone on to the library.

Closely questioned by the coroner, he said that he had left his position at the foot of the stairs only twice during the entire evening; once, when the veiled woman called, and again about twenty minutes later when the housekeeper summoned him to the dining-room to fasten a refractory window. On this second occasion he was not absent from his post more than three minutes. He sat reading with no further interruption until half past eleven. Then he saw the housekeeper enter the drawing-room, according to her usual custom; that was the hour at which she had been told to close the house, provided there were no callers. An instant later he heard her shrieks for help, and rushed into the library just as Mr. Randolph, who also heard them on the street, sprang onto the small balcony out-

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side the library and rapped on the French window for admittance. He had unlocked the window himself and admitted the detective. They two had searched the room together, but had found no trace of any person. He had heard no sounds from the library during the evening, but then, he was slightly deaf.

Randolph testified next, merely confirming the butler's story as to the fact that all of the windows had been fastened, and that there was no possibility of any person being hidden in the room. Two people at least breathed more freely as he took his seat without alluding to the miniature.

The housekeeper's testimony brought out nothing new, but when Margaretta Schwartz was called, there was a decided manifestation of interest among the reporters and servants present, for this young woman had been Mrs. Haworth's maid, and it was she who, several hours before the discovery of the murder, had repeated to her fellow-servants the bit of angry conversation that she had overheard.

In the face of the butler's positive testimony, it did not seem possible that Haworth could have entered the library without being observed, still the cold fact remained that some one had done so, and her testimony promised to be important at least. The young woman swore she had been Mrs. Haworth's maid for a year; that Mr. Haworth had engaged her in Germany shortly after the couple arrived. Mrs. Haworth was capricious and fitful and very passionate; but Mr. Haworth was always most kind and gentle with his wife. She had never heard any harsh word from his lips; that was the reason she had been so surprised last evening. At this point she broke down and commenced to sob nervously.

Randolph looked at her closely with an expression of satisfaction on his face. "You seem to me to be half

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in love with your master; I think I shall cultivate your acquaintance," he said mentally.

Persistent questioning at length extorted from the girl the fact that on the previous evening about eight o'clock, she had gone to her mistress' room with a dress that had been given to her to alter. As she was about to knock she heard angry voices and Mr. Haworth said, "It can't be any crime to kill such creatures as you!" She had hurried away then, intensely frightened. Nothing more could be extracted from the girl, a fact which the detective noted complacently.

A short pause ensued at this point, and it was evident from the whispered comments around that the mysterious veiled visitor was believed to be the unknown criminal. Randolph pondered that aspect of the case doubtfully; "she had only three or four minutes at most in which to commit the crime; besides, Mrs. Haworth was a remarkably large and strong woman, fully capable of defending herself from any attack by one of her own sex. The expression of rage and hatred on her face shows that she was neither asleep nor drugged when the crime was committed. The veiled woman is an interesting incident, a very interesting one, but—what is Haworth saying?"

Haworth stated briefly that he and his wife had dined alone at seven o'clock; that they remained at the table but a short time, then went direct to his wife's boudoir. He had become irritated at a remark she made, and might have used the words attributed to him by the maid. He was not well last evening, and was really not responsible for his language. He had then gone direct to his smoking room. No, with a peculiar hesitation, he had not seen his wife again alive. The butler about ten-thirty brought him a begging note from a woman. The note was not signed, and he destroyed it. He had replied very briefly that

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he did not feel equal to seeing the writer that night, but would do so the next day. An hour later the butler called him to the library and he found his wife lying there dead.

There was a gleam of admiration in Randolph's eyes as he watched the young man giving his testimony slowly and painfully. "I'll swear," he said to himself, "that he is telling the exact truth; whether it is the whole truth or not is another matter, however. I'm sorry for Fairfax; he is in an awkward position, although he doesn't know it. I must put some good man on the watch, since it seems that I am to go on with the case. I don't know where I stand exactly, but of one thing I am sure, that George Fairfax does not as yet know that his sister was the mysterious caller."

Shortly before the inquest commenced, Fairfax had called Randolph aside, and in Haworth's name had secured his services for ferreting out the assassin of Mrs. Haworth. He had also given the detective a brief history of the broken miniature. If Randolph did not consider the explanation entirely satisfactory, he was careful not to let that fact appear.

Fairfax had also sent a note to Constance telling her not to expect him until evening. When he finally returned home he found her looking for him with undisguised anxiety.

"Is there a verdict yet? What is it?"

"The stereotyped thing: 'Death by the hand of some person or persons unknown.' It could not have been anything else in view of the evidence. It is the most mysterious crime I ever heard of, though I am inclined to the belief that the veiled woman had something to do with it."

"Tell me about the testimony, every detail. I could not bring myself to look at the papers."

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Fairfax related the proceedings of the day in a circumstantial fashion, but when he had repeated the butler's testimony she stopped him, making him reiterate it again and again.

Then she sat in silence, evidently pondering it in some surprise.

"The butler fell asleep," she asserted at last, more as if speaking to herself than to her brother.

She was brought to her senses by his amazed query, "What is the matter with you, Constance? What do you know of the affair?"

She frowned impatiently. "I forgot that you were here, but I might as well tell you what I saw last night, especially as Frank Blanchard saw it, too; he came for me about half past eight last evening; Edith was ill and wished to see me about some Guild work. As we passed the Haworths' we noticed the light in the library and saw the shadows of a man and woman; the curtains were partially drawn, so that we could not distinguish their features plainly, but there was no doubt about the sexes. Frank made some comment about Haworth and his rustic beauty. He will certainly recall the incident and tell the police. When we returned about ten o'clock, we could still see the man's shadow; of course, we supposed it to be Van; the woman did not seem to be present then."

"Of course it was not Van," Fairfax said shortly. "What idea have you got into your brain, Connie? Old John is a night owl and never falls asleep before the wee, small hours. But this is an odd story of yours. How any one could have gained entrance to the library is a profound mystery. The second time that you passed, the poor woman must have been dead. The man must have been the murderer. Where did he come from? Who was he? Where did he vanish? Can you see any solution of the puzzle, Connie?"

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A slightly contemptuous smile touched his sister's lips. "Puzzles are generally simple things, after all. Never mind my theories. I only think that it is clear that John's years of service are telling on him. He is growing old."

"You are mistaken, I am sure. Besides, as the front door was locked and the other servants away in the back part of the house. How could the murderer have gained entrance even if John had indulged in a brief nap? Remember that the windows were locked."

"I remember it well," she said in a low tone. "Go on and give me the rest of your story."

"Very well, but I must tell Randolph what you saw," and Fairfax hurriedly related the remaining events of the day, adding with evident dislike for the task, "I have something disagreeable to tell you, Constance, but I think that you should know of it. It seems that Van had a miniature of you painted in Rome, intending it as a surprise for us. Despite his silence, it seems that he did not forget us. He was looking at the miniature yesterday and in some way dropped and broke it and forgot all about it. That seems rather odd, still I can see how it might happen. Fortunately the coroner did not see it, but Randolph found it. You need not feel anxious, he has sense enough to know that it has no bearing on this case."

Constance smiled faintly, but made no reply.

Several days passed. Randolph had worked indefatigably, but without making much headway. In fact every item of information that he gleaned had only served thus far to deepen the mystery. Margaretta Schwartz had at last yielded to his friendly, irresistible manner, and had become confidential. From the first he had been convinced that the girl possessed more knowledge than had appeared at the inquest. A secret weighed upon her, and she longed to unbosom herself

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to some one. She dared not trust her fellow-servants but at length she grew to like Randolph, who haunted the house persistently and who sought her society on all occasions.

Believing firmly in her romantic feeling for Haworth, he had won the girl's confidence by his emphatic declaration that Haworth knew nothing of the crime. This was not strictly true, but it served its purpose, especially when he hinted vaguely at certain clues he had, and declared that before long he should be able to bring the murderer to justice; that indeed he could make an arrest any day that he wished.

This last assertion was, perhaps, true, though hardly in the sense in which the girl accepted it. She heard him with inexpressible relief, then burst into tears, exclaiming between her sobs that she had always known that Mr. Haworth had nothing to do with the crime, but that the police were so stupid she had been afraid to tell them anything. She would never have repeated to the coroner the bit of conversation which she overheard if she had not been so foolish beforehand as to tell her fellow-servants about it. She was so glad that Mr. Randolph was on the tracks of the criminal. Who had committed the deed?

"You must not ask me that now," he said gravely; "I must work quietly a while yet, but you can help me and help your master, too, by answering my questions. Now tell me, truly. You went back and saw your mistress that night after her husband had left the room?"

"Yes," said the girl, with a startled look, "how did you know?"

"It was natural that you would do so; now tell me all that happened."

"Mrs. Haworth rang for me shortly after eight o'clock and gave me two notes to deliver at once. I

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was to hurry with them. One was addressed to her brother, who was stopping at a small boarding house only a few squares away; the other was addressed to Mr. Aiken, who was at a hotel that was also near by; I delivered the notes, then stopped to see a friend, and returned about half past ten. I went up-stairs by the servants' way, but crossed immediately to the front of the house to see if Mrs. Haworth needed me."

"Well," said Randolph, feeling that the most important part of her testimony was yet to come, "go on, tell me everything."

She still hesitated. "You are sure that what I say cannot harm Mr. Haworth?"

"My dear girl," the detective returned warmly, "neither you nor any one else can injure an innocent person. Do not be afraid, but go ahead with the story."

She sighed, then resumed irresolutely. "I suppose I can trust you, or I certainly would not be telling you this, though it does seem as if I would die if I kept it to myself any longer. As I crossed to Mrs. Haworth's room I saw the footman going downstairs with a note in his hand. A woman met him at the drawing-room door, and as he followed her into the vestibule and opened the outer doors, Mr. Haworth came quickly out of his room and ran lightly down the stairs, passing into the drawing room. An instant later, the footman, who is old and slow in his movements, turned back into the hall and closed the door. Some twenty minutes later, probably when the housekeeper called John for a moment to the dining room, I heard my master's door close and knew that he had returned to his room."

Randolph leaned back in his chair with a gesture to enforce silence. He wanted to think. Had Haworth found his wife alive when he entered the li-

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brary? If so, he had sworn falsely at the inquest and was probably a murderer. On the other hand, if he had found his wife dead, why had he not summoned aid at once? Then, too, had he accidentally returned to his room when he would be unobserved, or had he watched for such an opportunity? The unknown caller, who, for several reasons, he felt confident to have been Constance Fairfax, must have had a full view of the library while she waited for her note to be delivered. What was in that note? Had Mrs. Haworth been alive when she entered? Had the two women exchanged any words? If Mrs. Haworth was then dead, why had Constance Fairfax kept silent? It seemed a hopeless puzzle, but Randolph registered a solemn vow to make Haworth and Miss Fairfax tell him their stories before he was twenty-four hours older. Then he turned to the girl again, struck by a new thought.

"Can you tell me anything about Mr. Aiken?"

"Why, yes. Mrs. Haworth met him in Germany; we were stopping at a small out-of-the-way village. I heard Mrs. Haworth accuse her husband once of trying to keep her out of every one's way. I know that he had teachers for her and that he was very unwilling to return home when we came, but Mrs. Haworth would not stay in Europe any longer; so he had to come. He had known Mr. Aiken slightly here, and when they met on the street he had to introduce Mrs. Haworth, but she thought he was angry because he was forced to do it. After that Mr. Aiken came to the house almost every day, and very often Mr. Haworth knew nothing of it. He returned by the steamer on which we came and he has been here often since. Mrs. Haworth used to receive notes from him daily."

"Could you find any of them for me, do you think?" Randolph inquired anxiously.

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"I'll look, sir," and the girl hurried off, eager to do something that might aid her master.

Half an hour later, she returned with a good-sized bundle of notes, and the detective thanked her heartily as he slipped them into his pocket, and cautioned her to be silent. He pondered deeply all the way to his house, and as a result of his cogitations sent a note to George Fairfax that speedily brought him the following answer:

"MY DEAR RANDOLPH:

"Your note is very mysterious, and I confess that I hardly understand what you are driving at. You can rely, however, upon my sister and Mr. Haworth being here this evening at eight-thirty o'clock. They will answer any questions that you see fit to ask them, then.

"Yours very truly,

"GEORGE S. FAIRFAX."

Randolph read the note with an expression of intense satisfaction, then turned his attention to the bundle of letters which Margaretta Schwartz had given him. There were about twenty letters in all, most of them arranging for meetings that should appear to Haworth as entirely accidental—if he should chance to hear of them. As Randolph read the last one, however, he gave a low whistle of astonishment. Aiken's note was evidently the one that had been delivered on the afternoon of the murder, and in it he promised to call that evening at 9 o'clock.

Outwardly at least, it was a very calm quartette which met that evening in the Fairfax house. The detective kept his appointment, fully resolved upon a certain line of conduct.

He meant to make the others talk freely, and he believed that he could achieve that end more easily by strategy than by threats.

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Whatever his own convictions, he would, for this once, assert an implicit belief in both the man and the woman.

If he could not thus induce them to speak frankly, he would take some energetic measures.

His greeting was cheerful. "I presume that you are both wondering what questions I have to ask you; I want to tell my story first, then I trust you will see how necessary your information must be."

He graphically outlined Margaretta Schwartz's tale, noting shrewdly the varied and intense emotions depicted upon the countenances of his auditors while he was speaking.

"If this were known generally," he concluded with emphasis, "Mr. Haworth would doubtless be considered guilty of his wife's death. Now I am able to prove that he certainly could not have committed the murder unless he did it during the twenty minutes succeeding the call of the unknown woman."

Constance Fairfax leaned forward breathlessly; "I suppose that you rely entirely upon old John's testimony in reaching that conclusion?"

"No, Miss Fairfax, I do not, although I consider his evidence unimpeachable. However, I have also the testimony of his valet who will swear that his master did not leave the smoking room from the time he entered it, which was at least fifteen minutes before Mrs. Haworth went downstairs, until ten-thirty. During that time the man was arranging some curiosities that Mr. Haworth brought from Europe. He unpacked the boxes containing the bric-a-brac, in the upper hall, and as the door of the smoking-room stood partly open all the time, he can swear that Mr. Haworth did not leave the room once. About ten-thirty, the time at which the footman came upstairs, the man finished his work and went to the servant's hall. You

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see, Miss Fairfax, that the evidence is perfectly clear. There is nothing, however, as yet to show that Mr. Haworth did not commit the crime during the twenty minutes that he was downstairs. His reticence regarding that incident would certainly be damaging in the eyes of the public. To be sure, according to the physician's testimony, the murder was committed as early as ten o'clock, perhaps earlier, but that is a very slight basis on which to clear a man. Of course, you will understand, I trust, that I am only putting the cold facts before you from the friendliest of motives."

"If that is all"—Constance commenced eagerly, and with a new light on her face.

"Wait, please," the detective interrupted gently. "I am not quite through as yet. I have a little story of my own to tell. You never inquired, Mr. Fairfax, how I chanced to be in the neighborhood on the night of the murder and so was able to respond promptly to the housekeeper's call for help. The truth is, that I was doing some shadowing on that square in connection with the Lonsdale robbery, and so I was in the neighborhood all evening. I was watching for one person, particularly, so that I did not pay much attention to any one else. However, I saw Mr. Blanchard and a lady whom I now know to be Miss Fairfax pass down the street about half past eight. An hour and a half later they returned. I noticed the light in Mr. Haworth's library, as well as they, but I was too engrossed in other things to take any note of the occupants, or even to know if there were any."

Randolph paused as if a little uncertain how to proceed. He glanced at Miss Fairfax, but if there was any significance in his look, she declined to notice it.

"So," he resumed, "as far as I can see just now, the only person at present who can clearly establish Mr. Haworth's innocence, is the mysterious caller. She

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can tell us whether Mrs. Haworth was alive or not when she left, for when the housekeeper found Mrs. Haworth, both the sliding doors and the portieres of the library were drawn open, so that a person in the drawing room commanded a full view of the room beyond. If this unknown caller will swear that she saw Mrs. Haworth dead, it will clear up every vestige of suspicion."

George Fairfax had been moving restlessly in his seat for some time.

"What are you after, Randolph? I thought you believed that woman to be the criminal. If she were not, she would certainly have raised the alarm on seeing a person lying there murdered."

"I haven't fathomed her motive yet, Mr. Fairfax, but I think I can prove to you later that she was not the criminal. Let me go back to my story, please, for a moment. Shortly after Miss Fairfax and Mr. Blanchard passed me the first time, Mr. Aiken, whom I believe you all know, walked up and down the square several times; finally he was joined by a friend and the two went off together. There was nothing else that attracted my notice especially until nearly half past ten. I had wandered up the street a square or two, though I was still keeping a keen eye on the Lonsdale house. Suddenly I saw the door of this house open, and a woman, heavily veiled, came out. I thought it was unsafe for her to be out so late without some protector, so I followed her at a respectful distance. She walked rapidly down the street and rang the bell at Mr. Haworth's house. Miss Fairfax, am I right in supposing that you were that woman?"

"You are," she answered composedly, utterly ignoring the consternation plainly depicted on the faces of her brother and Haworth.

"Now," said the detective gently, "I am sure that

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you see the importance of being perfectly frank with me. Tell me all the incidents of that day commencing with your afternoon call on Mrs. Haworth."

"Very well," she answered, "I see no reason in keeping quiet any longer. Hush, George," as her brother began an amazed protest, "let me alone. I went to call on Mrs. Haworth, as I had planned. The butler said I would find her in the drawing room. He was mistaken, however, for Mrs. Haworth and her brother had left the room together only a few moments before. I learned this afterward. I went toward the library then, expecting to find her there. Instead of seeing her, however, I found her husband. He was looking at something so intently that he failed to notice my entrance. I walked up to him, and then I saw that he was looking at the miniature which Mr. Randolph found the next morning. My coming startled him so that he dropped it. I was very angry because he had had it painted without my permission, and he finally promised to send it to my brother the next day as a friendly remembrance. Then we forgot all about it, for Mrs. Haworth and her brother entered the drawing room in search of a glove she had dropped. The portieres of the library were nearly drawn, so that they did not see us, and Mrs. Haworth's brother made a remark which startled and shocked us both so immeasurably that we never thought of the portrait again."

Here she paused for the first time, seemingly a little uncertain as to how she should proceed. At last she said, half nervously, "I do not think I had better say anything more about Mrs. Haworth; if Mr. Haworth wishes to supply a hiatus, he can do so later, but I do not feel at liberty to repeat what we chanced to overhear. The remark, whatever it was, made Mr. Haworth intensely angry, and I was so frightened at the expression of his face that I caught his arm and kept

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him forcibly from going into the other room. A second later, the two passed out into the hall without suspecting our presence. I remained some time longer, talking to Mr. Haworth, then went directly home. When Mr. Blanchard and myself saw the shadows in the library, I supposed, of course, that Mr. Haworth was with his wife, and, as he seemed to be gesticulating fiercely on each occasion, I felt very anxious. After I reached home I thought of the matter more and more. Of course, it was all very foolish, but I knew that Mr. Haworth had had the greatest provocation that any human being could. I felt fearful lest he should do something in his passion that he would regret all his life. The more I thought of it, the more nervous I grew, and at last, in sheer desperation, I resolved to send him a line urging him to be careful. I put on a heavy veil because I did not care to be recognized so late at night."

She stopped, and for the first time during the evening glanced at Haworth. He was watching her intently with an expression of incredulity and surprise hard to fathom. She blushed hotly.

"It is not easy to go on," she said, in a low tone, "I doubt if Mr. Haworth ever forgives me when he hears all. It had not been my intention to enter the house, but when the butler said that he would bring me a reply at once, I felt as if I must have some word of reassurance. So I let John show me into the drawing-room. I saw that he did not recognize me, although I have known him all my life. The drawing-room was only dimly lighted, but the library beyond was brilliantly illuminated." She looked around at the anxious faces, breathing heavily. "I saw Mrs. Haworth lying on the couch. Something in her expression struck me with terror, and I hurried to her side. She was dead."

"Why did you not summon help?" her brother asked.

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She glanced at him in despair. "Can't you understand," she cried in desperation; "I thought that Van had been with her all evening. I knew that he had great cause for hating her, and—— Can you ever, ever forgive me, Van?" she cried, with tears in her eyes, and voluntarily addressing him for the first time since the murder.

"Hush!" he interposed, with evident embarrassment; "you were justified in all your conclusions—there is nothing for which you should ask my forgiveness. But much——"

"May I interrupt you?" Randolph said. "It is very necessary that I get away from this house as soon as possible. Indeed, I expect to be obliged to leave the city to-night, in your interest, and I must hurry. Miss Fairfax's evidence has completely exculpated Mr. Haworth."

"But it inculpates me, does it not?" she asked, with a wan smile.

"No, it does not," the detective replied, with real heartiness. "Of course, there are several points yet which Mr. Haworth must clear up, but let me briefly point out the arguments in your favor. In the first place, the physician's testimony is not very weighty, but it is still on your side and shows that the murder was committed half an hour or more before you called. Again, you are a much slighter woman than was Mrs. Haworth; she could easily have overpowered you, for it is plain that she was murdered while she was awake and in full possession of her senses. Then, too, the shadows seen by Mr. Blanchard, as well as by yourself, must not be forgotten. It is very evident to me now that that man was the murderer. How he gained entrance to the house, I do not know; he may have been in the library for an hour before the butler took his seat in view of the drawing-room door."

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"Granting that," said Fairfax curiously, "how could he have left without any one's knowledge?"

"I can't tell you that yet, but I firmly believe that he did contrive to do so, and that, too, without the aid of any one in the house. Miss Fairfax, I must beg your pardon as well as Mr. Haworth's. I have been entertaining all manner of vague suspicions about you both. You were neither of you frank with me, and that in itself was a ground for strong suspicion. I did not believe that either of you was the actual assassin, but I did suspect you of complicity in the deed. I hope I am forgiven. I knew that you both were only telling me half-truths. You should always trust a detective that you engage with all the facts. Mr. Haworth, I hope you will emulate Miss Fairfax's example, and tell me your story as fully as she did hers."

"I will do so if you wish, Mr. Randolph," Van said, with a disturbed air, "but let me assure you beforehand that it is a disgraceful and humiliating tale that I have to tell. It can only give me pain, and I do not see that it can aid you in the least. If you insist upon hearing it, you shall be gratified, but I would like to be excused from the ordeal if possible."

"I am sorry to give you any annoyance, but I must hear your story and at once, too," said the detective firmly, as he pulled out his watch. "I must leave this house in three-quarters of an hour."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to Philadelphia after a man who, I am sure, is not the murderer, but who nevertheless is going to leave the country because of Mrs. Haworth's death."

"There is no use questioning me," the detective said emphatically, in reply to the eager exclamations which instantly assailed him; "the story is too long for to-night, but if I am prospered, you shall hear it to-mor-

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row evening. Now, Mr. Haworth, commence at once; you might tell us first what remark it was which so startled yourself and Miss Fairfax."

"It was a remark which might well startle any one," Haworth said grimly; "I should state in the first place that my wife supposed me to be upstairs in my own room. I had been there, indeed, until some five minutes before Miss Fairfax entered; but when Mrs. Haworth and her brother came upstairs I went quietly to the library to avoid meeting Joshua Simpkins. As Miss Fairfax told you, the portieres of the library were nearly drawn, so that we were not visible to the two as they returned to the drawing-room in search of some missing article.

Joshua Simpkins was speaking in a resonant whisper, and every syllable reached us distinctly. He said, 'Well, sis, that was a good night's work when we fooled the rich swell into marrying you.'

"I was too utterly astounded and dismayed to move for a moment, then the devilish plot became clear to me, and I started toward the drawing-room—— My expression must have terrified Miss Fairfax, for she caught my arm; I could not release myself without using force, and in a moment Joshua Simpkins and his sister had left the drawing-room. It was as plain to Miss Fairfax as it was to me that there had been a vile conspiracy which had ruined my whole life. For many reasons, I thought that an explanation was due her. So, before she left I told her briefly of the circumstances which led to my wretched marriage."

"Tell us, also."

"Is that essential?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I must go back to the ill-starred hunting tour which immediately preceded my marriage. Each fall I had been accustomed to hunt for a fortnight or so in

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the Adirondacks. As our party generally camped near the Lodac inn, I had come to have a casual acquaintance with all of the inmates.

"Last year, a trifling accident caused us to break camp earlier than usual; the other men went home; at first I expected to return with them; then I suddenly concluded to stay for a week longer, making the inn my headquarters. Everything went well for several days; I saw considerable of the girl, but I barely gave her a thought. My mind was full of another woman too immeasurably her superior—one that I had loved all my life. The Simpkins family consisted of only four people—the father, mother, son, and daughter. There were no servants.

"On the morning before I had planned to return home, Mr. and Mrs. Simpkins left the inn for a week's visit with some relatives who lived twenty miles away. Soon after they left, a storm came up that prevented my hunting that day. Toward evening the storm developed into a veritable hurricane. It grew intensely cold; the rain turned into sleet; tree after tree was torn from its roots by the fury of the wind. I had even some real fears lest the inn might not be able to withstand the assaults upon it. No one could have lived an hour in that storm, and you must remember that the nearest dwelling of any sort was four miles distant. As the night deepened, the storm seemed to redouble its fury. I would not have ventured out on the mountain that night for all the wealth of the Rothschilds. After supper I went to my room. I tried to read and smoke a little. About ten-thirty there was a knock at the door, and Virginia Simpkins asked if she could come in a moment.

"I opened the door, of course, and then I saw that she had a pile of clean towels on her arm.

" 'I clean forgot these before, Mr. Haworth,' she

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said, 'and when I saw your light, I ventured to bring them up.'

"I thanked her, but instead of handing them to me, she walked in and placed them on the dresser—Oh,"—and the young man stopped in sheer self-contempt—"I was an easy dupe."

"Poor old fellow," Fairfax said commiseratingly.

"Well, the girl stood talking for a few moments about the storm, wondering if it had abated any, and telling some harrowing stories of hunters who had lost their way on the mountain in just such a hurricane the year before, and who had at last perished from exposure and fatigue. She finally crossed to my side as I stood by the window and raised it a trifle—to see, she said, if the wind were dying down any. As she did so a terrible gust blew out the lamp and left us in utter darkness. Before I had time to make a move there came a knock at the door (Virginia Simpkins had closed it as she entered) and the girl, in an apparent paroxysm of fright, threw her arms around me.

"A moment later, without giving me time to speak, Joshua Simpkins entered with a lighted candle in his hand. He stopped, as if thunderstruck by the tableau before him. I suppose it was effective."

"They certainly did it well," the detective murmured admiringly.

"Yes, they did. The wind (or at least I supposed then that it was the wind) had blown down the girl's hair; it was all tumbled and disheveled as was also her dress. Apparently she was the image of detected guilt. Her brother broke into a volley of oaths; he refused to listen to a word from either of us. I tried in vain to explain. He silenced me sharply by saying that my morals were no concern of his, but that he should take good care his sister did not remain an hour longer under the roof which she had disgraced. I

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wonder if you all think that I was a perfect coward," Van said suddenly; "Simpkins was more than a match for me physically, besides he had taken good care that morning to impress me with the fact that he always carried a loaded revolver. He had slipped his hand into his pocket, indeed, and drawn it out as soon as he discovered his sister."

"You were not a coward at all, Van," Constance said softly; "it was the fact that you believed their acting to be reality which gave them their easy victory. Had you expected a plot, you would never have yielded to them."

"That is true enough," the young man said eagerly; "and I believe that their acting would have deceived an archangel. The girl prayed, and begged and protested; even throwing herself on her knees before her brother. He kicked her, swearing that if she had not left the house inside of five minutes he would put her out—that there was no place for wantons under his father's roof. Of course, I tried to interfere, and protested and raged; but he was absolutely deaf to any word of mine. When I rushed at him furiously, he leveled his revolver at me, swearing to shoot if I ventured to touch him. "Well, the girl's pleadings kept up until at last he seemed wearied of them. He seized her by the wrist, dragging her to the hall, vowing to throw her outdoors—unless—he stopped, as if struck by a sudden thought—unless I would swear to marry her the next morning and save her good name. I was completely duped and saw no escape. It seemed to me that the girl's life lay in my hands, so I consented. We were married the next morning, in the nearest village, by the local preacher."

"Constance," said her brother reproachfully, "why didn't you tell me this before? Surely I had a right to know."

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"I did mean to tell you, George, on the very evening of the murder. When you spoke to me about my call I felt too much unstrung to repeat Van's tale, but I fully intended to do so that evening. Van had given me permission. You were not home when I returned from the Blanchards' or I should have told you then. After my discovery of Mrs. Haworth's murder, I kept silent purposely. I thought," with a vivid blush, "that the tale would supply too evident a motive for the crime. Then, too, I could not help feeling that, but for me, the tragedy would not have occurred."

"What do you mean?" the query burst from all three of the men.

"If I had not made that unfortunate call, Mrs. Haworth would certainly have seen her husband in the library and that incriminating remark would never have been made by Joshua Simpkins. You see, before I entered the library, the draperies were drawn aside; my cloak caught in them and they fell together, completely shutting us off from the drawing room. Then, too, if Mr. Haworth and myself had not both been thinking so intently of that miniature we would not have been silent and our voices would have reached the pair as they entered the outer room. In that case, too, Mr. Haworth would not have learned of his wife's treachery. If even my brother had accompanied me there could not possibly have been such an unfortunate arrangement of circumstances."

"You were nervous and morbid, Miss Fairfax," the detective affirmed, "otherwise you would not have entertained such thoughts for a moment. Now, Mr. Haworth, kindly finish your story as quickly as possible."

"I took my wife abroad as you all know; I procured the best teachers for her, but she refused to study. I had intended to remain abroad permanently; I did not

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feel that I could face my old friends again, but at the end of a year I was forced to yield to her unceasing importunities and return. I had not the faintest spark of affection or even of liking for her, but I always treated her with perfect courtesy and kindness until the evening of the murder. After Miss Fairfax left I did not see my wife until we met at the dinner-table. She must have surmised then that something was wrong. I did not once address her directly. I could not. After dinner I went to her room, determined to have an understanding. The conversation was very brief, for I did not dare trust myself in her presence. I think she was frightened at my manner; I gave her my ultimatum very quickly. It was that she should return to her father's house next day. If she did so and kept out of my sight for the rest of her life, I would make her an annual allowance. If she tried to contest the matter in court I would fight it to the end and she should never have one cent from me. I had law and equity both on my side, and she was practically powerless. Then I left her. I went to the smoking-room and remained there until the butler brought me Miss Fairfax's note. I called it a begging note at the inquest, and the wording of it justified me in doing so. It ran something like this:

"I beg you to do nothing rash. Do not act so hastily and harshly that you will have cause to regret it all your life."

"I sent back merely a line:

"I dare not trust myself to see you to-night, but will be at your house to-morrow."

"After the butler had left with the note, I concluded that I would go down after all. I was anxious to see Miss Fairfax again, and there was no legitimate reason why I should not. Besides, it occurred to me that I had really not replied to her note. I hurried down-

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stairs, but must have reached the hall just as she and John entered the vestibule. I went into the drawing room—Miss Fairfax was not there, as I had expected she would be—but in the room beyond I saw my wife lying dead.”

“Why did you not summon help at once?” the detective inquired curiously; “that part of the affair has puzzled me immensely.”

“I am thoroughly ashamed of my reasons now,” Harworth said in a low tone; “but then they seemed perfectly reasonable. When I was talking to my wife after supper I found that Mr. Aiken had been making her jealous with stories regarding Miss Fairfax and myself. She seemed an incarnate fiend in her rage; she had found Miss Fairfax’s card and knew that she had called. The coincidence of the call and the discovery of her treachery rendered her passionately angry. She seemed to think that there had been some connivance between us. Beside the couch I found a handkerchief bearing Miss Fairfax’s name, and I jumped to the conclusion that my wife had insulted Miss Fairfax and had even attempted violence. I supposed that the tragedy had occurred in some accidental fashion while Miss Fairfax was defending herself. I hid the handkerchief and waited in the drawing room until I heard old John answer the summons of the housekeeper and go into the dining room. When I reached my room, I burned the handkerchief and wrote from Miss Fairfax. I presume she attributed my reticence at the inquest to a natural desire to keep her name from newspaper notoriety, but I had a far stronger motive than that for remaining silent. I have suffered such untold agonies because of my hasty conclusions that you and Constance can afford to forgive me, George, though I frankly confess that I don’t deserve it.”

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"You are quits, I think," Fairfax said genially. "I do not see how either of you can reproach the other."

"That is true," the detective said rising hastily, "and your explanations have been most satisfactory. Now I must be off."

"At least tell us whom you are going after," Haworth said imploringly. The detective paused with his hand on the door knob. "I am going to Philadelphia to see Harold Aiken, though I can assure you that he is not the criminal. Mr. Haworth's story, however, has been most suggestive and I believe that I know who the murderer is."

Despite the detective's assurance that he would return the following evening, it was not until the second morning that any word came from him.

About ten o'clock on that day, Haworth received a brief dispatch stating that Randolph was detained in Philadelphia and might not return for several days.

Haworth chafed at the delay.

Four days later, Randolph returned, but instead of seeking Haworth he went in search of George Fairfax, who greeted him warmly.

"I'm glad to see you, Randolph; your mysterious hints when you left have thrown us all into a ferment of excitement."

"Well, here I am at last."

"I hope that you are going to be communicative."

"Only to a certain extent as yet. I will tell you my experiences while I was gone; in fact I came for that purpose, but I am not ready to impart my theories yet."

"I will send for Mr. Haworth at once."

"Don't. He would rather hear the story which I have to tell from your lips than mine. A man naturally doesn't care to be told that his wife has been indulging in a sentimental flirtation. Of course, Mr.

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Haworth didn't care very deeply for his wife; still this story would sound better from you."

"As you think best."

"I must tell you in the first place that when I was relating Margaretta Schwartz's story the other day, I suppressed a portion of it, the part that involved these letters."

The detective drew out the little packet of Aiken's notes which Mrs. Haworth had been foolish enough to preserve.

He told briefly how they had come into his possession and of the intimacy which he had discovered to have existed between the writer and the murdered woman.

"I will read them aloud," Randolph said finally. He did so without waiting for any objection on the part of his auditor. He commenced with the notes of earliest date and when he reached the one which had been sent on the afternoon of the murder he gave a peculiar emphasis to the date.

"MY DEAREST—Expect me at nine o'clock. Cannot be with you earlier. As ever,
HAROLD."

Fairfax sprang to his feet in uncontrollable excitement.

"The date—the time! Harold Aiken must have been the murderer then, though I can scarcely credit it."

"It was not he, though I might have thought so myself in the light of such evidence had I not chanced to see him on the night of the murder. You remember that I told you he approached the house on that night and walked up and down the square several times. When I saw him I merely supposed that he was keeping some sort of a shady appointment. He did not offer to enter the house, however, and about nine

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o'clock he walked away in company with a friend. I was very sure that he did not return, but as soon as I read this note I traced up his whereabouts for the balance of the night. He could establish a perfect alibi."

"Then why did you wish to find him?"

"I wanted to know why he did not keep the appointment. You remember that I said that Margaretta Schwartz was given two notes to deliver just after the quarrel between Mr. Haworth and his wife. One of these notes was addressed to Mr. Aiken, and I was extremely anxious to learn its contents.

"However, when I tried to put my hands on Aiken, he had left the city. The hotel clerks could give me no information, and I was nearly in despair until I remembered his weakness for women of all classes—then I thought of the chambermaid.

"He might have said something to her, I argued—and he had! The girl was an honest country girl, much incensed because he had tried to 'chuck her under the chin.' That was on the afternoon following the murder, and the man was half drunk. When she turned on him fiercely because of his familiarity he said sullenly that she needn't make such a fuss about nothing; anyway she wouldn't be troubled with him much longer; he was going to Philadelphia that afternoon and before the week was over he would be on the ocean.

"Of course, I went to Philadelphia. He was at none of the hotels, and I had a task finding him. At last I succeeded, though, and I terrified him so thoroughly with threats of arrest that he was glad to tell the truth.

"He and Mrs. Haworth had kept up a sentimental intimacy for eight months, though he swore that their relations were perfectly proper—in the ordinary sense

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of the word, and I imagine that he was telling the truth. About half past eight on the night of the murder, he had received a hurried line from Mrs. Haworth telling him not to call that night. He unexpectedly found himself at liberty sooner than he had anticipated, so, immediately after receiving the note he walked around to the Haworth house trusting that he would be able to set some glimpse of Mrs. Haworth or learn at least why he was ordered not to appear.

"He did not see her, and finally at nine o'clock he went off with a friend to the theater; afterward he went to his club, and did not reach his hotel until two o'clock.

"Next day when he learned of the murder he was terrified. He had told Mrs. Haworth to destroy his notes, but he did not feel at all sure that she had done so. He was afraid that his last note would be found and would implicate him, so he planned to leave the country. Some business matters forced him to go to Philadelphia or I should have missed him."

"There is nothing really important in all this," Fairfax remarked disappointedly.

The detective smiled. "I was glad to have my theories regarding Mrs. Haworth's note to him so fully corroborated. He gave me one other item of information that may be useful. To prevent the frequency of his calls coming to the knowledge of her husband or the servants, Mrs. Haworth often admitted him to the library by means of the low French window through which I gained access on the night of the murder. This explains how the murderer might have been admitted, though, of course, it does not tell how he escaped from the house." The detective rose to leave, then paused as if struck by a sudden thought. "I believe that none of Mrs. Haworth's family have been here since the murder?"

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"They will be here this afternoon at three, Randolph."

"All of them?"

"Yes—all; that is, the father and mother and brother; there are other relatives, I believe, but they will hardly come. Mr. Haworth sent word to his wife's parents as soon as the murder was discovered, but it was some time before any message could reach them in that heathenish district where they live. Mrs. Simpkins and her husband were both so prostrated by the awful news that it was impossible for them to be here in time for the funeral. The body, you know, was embalmed and placed in the vault, and the interment will take place to-morrow morning after Mrs. Haworth's family has arrived."

"When did Joshua Simpkins leave? He was in the city you know on the afternoon preceding the murder."

"I can't tell you."

"Ah, Haworth, I'm glad to see you. Randolph is asking me some questions about your brother-in-law that I can't answer."

"I merely wanted to know when Mr. Simpkins left the city. I thought he might be able to give me some information regarding Mrs. Haworth's movements. She was with him for several hours, I believe on the afternoon of the murder?"

"Yes she was. He had been in the city several days at that time but although he was invited to stop with us, he went to a boarding house kept by some acquaintances. I suppose he preferred the greater freedom from restraint that he could have at such a place. He generally took his meals with us, however. He lunched with us on the last day of Mrs. Haworth's life, and told me good-by afterward. He said he must return home by the eleven o'clock train that night, and that he would not be able to dine with us, as he

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had promised some friends to eat with them. He added that he should probably see his sister again that afternoon, but I might be out when he called. He thanked me in really a very pleasant fashion for some financial aid I had given him, and then he went off. I didn't like the fellow, and, although I was in the house when he returned in the afternoon, I avoided seeing him, as you know."

"And he left that night?"

"Yes; after the discovery of the tragedy, I sent at once to his boarding place, thinking that he might possibly have been detained or missed the train. The landlady said that he came in with a friend shortly before train time; paid his bill, and left."

"He and his sister seemed to think considerable of each other?" the detective said half-interrogatively.

"They undoubtedly did," Haworth promptly affirmed. "I know that my wife shared her allowance with him liberally, and really his sister was the only person in the world for whom Joshua Simpkins entertained the least vestige of affection. But, Mr. Randolph, I expected you to be the one to impart information to-day."

"I have already told Mr. Fairfax the little that I have discovered and he will repeat it to you. I must go now, and——"

"You cannot give us any actual clue?"

"Not to-day, but if you and Mr. Fairfax will meet me in your library to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock I expect to be able to give you a full history of the crime. It seems to me that Mrs. Haworth's family has a right to know what is being done. As the parents are not very well, it might be best to say nothing to them, but Joshua Simpkins ought to be present."

"You will find all three of us waiting for you."

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The next afternoon found each member of the quartette laboring under intense excitement. The detective felt that he was playing a hazardous game, and he was by no means sure that he would not be routed.

"If you will pardon me," he said, glancing at the pale faces before him, "I will go over the details of the crime so far as we have discovered them, for the benefit of Mr. Simpkins and also to refresh our own memories."

Randolph thereupon proceeded to narrate the story in a deliberate, circumstantial fashion, particularly exasperating to both Vanderling Haworth and George Fairfax.

He glanced at them when he had brought the story down to the limit of their knowledge. "So, you see, Mr. Aiken did not come, but another man did, and he was admitted by that window. There was a violent quarrel, which ended in Mrs. Haworth's death."

"But who was the man?"

"Her brother. Joshua Simpkins, I arrest you in the name of the law for the murder of your sister, Virginia Haworth."

The man sprang to his feet with a snarl of rage, and rushed furiously at the detective. Randolph was on his guard, and Joshua Simpkins, despite his extraordinary strength, was soon overpowered by the three men.

"If you want any mercy at all," the detective said sternly, "you will tell the truth now."

The man glared from one to the other like a wild animal at bay. "You needn't suppose that I would kill the only creature in the world for whom I cared," he growled.

"Whether you cared for her or not, you, and you only, are responsible for her death."

The man suddenly broke into tears.

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"It was all an accident," he groaned; "she sent for me that night to come at once and said that she would let me in at the library window. When I got there she stormed like a fury, accusing me of ruining her life because I had made that cursed boast which her husband had overheard. We had closed the library doors so that no one should hear us. The fact is that we had both drunk a good deal of wine when we were out together in the afternoon, so we were neither of us in a very good temper. I tried to calm her at first, but she would not listen to me. At last she seized that Venetian dagger and rushed toward me, saying that I deserved to be killed. I tried to wrest the dagger from her, but my foot slipped on a picture or something on the waxed floor. I had twisted her arm back of her so as to prevent her striking me, and, as my foot slipped, we both fell—and—and—the dagger ran into her and killed her. You can hang me if you want to," he burst out angrily, "but I am as innocent as you are."

"Keep to your story; how did you get out of the house?"

"I was too crazed with grief at first to think about leaving; it was about nine-thirty when the accident occurred. Finally I came to my senses and put her on the couch. I was afraid to leave by the window lest some one on the street should see me. I locked the window and—very softly—opened the library doors. I wanted to make it appear that some one in the house—her husband, in short—had committed the crime.

"I hid in the long, heavy draperies of the drawing room—just at the double door leading into the main hall. I saw the butler and dared not move for a long time. At last he showed some woman into the drawing room; she paused just a moment then passed on at once to the library as the butler went upstairs. I seized the chance and slipped out of the front door.

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"Outside where I had been lodging, I met a friend; he went in with me while I paid my bill and got my baggage."

There was a long silence, then Haworth rose wearily. "Randolph," said he, "you shall have double the sum I promised you; but I would like you to let this man off. Morally, he is not guilty of the crime, and I cannot have the unsavory story of my married life retailed in all the papers of the country. I will give him a sum of money sufficient to enable him and his parents to live respectably in some other land. Can the matter drop here, sir?"

"If you wish; I believe that the man was telling the truth, and that Mrs. Haworth's death was purely accidental."

Fairfax called the detective aside, while Haworth was giving some stern instructions to the broken-down creature sobbing in the library.

"What will you do about the warrant of arrest? And how did you succeed in ferreting out the truth?"

"There is no warrant of arrest; it was all a game of bluff; I had no actual proof against the man, but I knew that he had received a note from his sister, and I conjectured that she sent for him to reproach him with the discovery of their plot—that was all."

"It was cleverly done," Fairfax said heartily.

"I am glad, if you are satisfied, and now I think that I had better leave. I will see you to-morrow."

It was some eighteen months later that Randolph received the announcement of two marriages, in both of which he seemed particularly interested. The first announcement was contained in a quaintly written letter signed, "Margaretta Feiss."

"I am glad she is happy," was Randolph's comment; "her husband is an honest fellow, and she will make

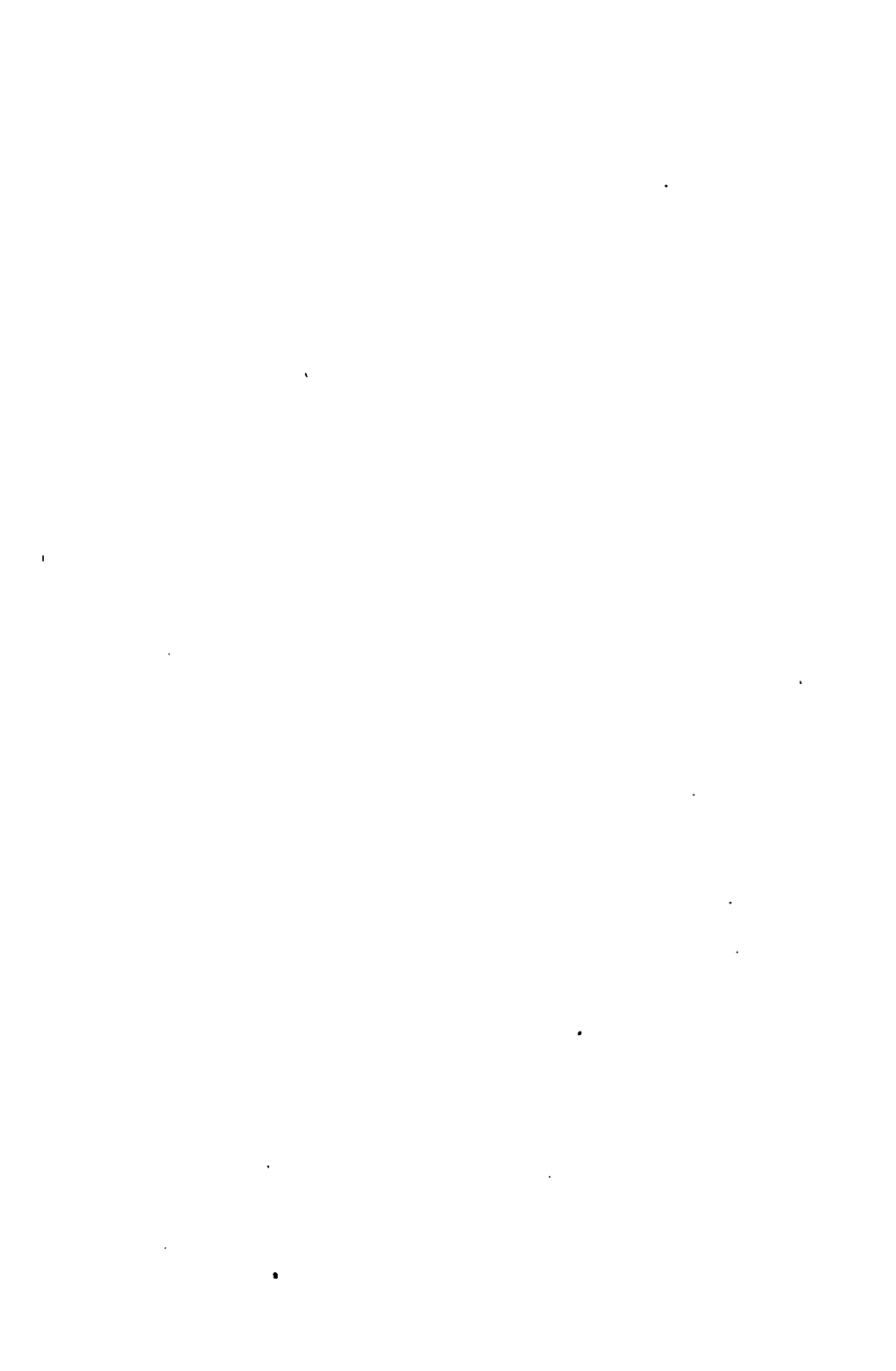
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none the worse wife because of her romantic feeling for her old master."

The second marriage was formally announced on thick white cards, handsomely engraved.

"Well, I am glad that they, too, are happy," Randolph said, slipping the cards back into their envelope, "they deserve to be. Constance Fairfax was certainly intended by fate to be Vanderling Haworth's wife."

A DIPLOMATIC ERROR



A DIPLOMATIC ERROR

"Why don't you confess, Bobby?" Mrs. Ordway spoke languidly from the depths of her steamer chair.

Her brother dropped his glasses and turned toward her good naturedly.

"I'm always willing to oblige you, Lucia; but just what are you driving at?"

"Don't underrate my powers of penetration! It was not pure solicitude for my health that started you off on a yachting cruise at this season."

Winthrop picked up his glasses again and scanned the horizon. "Don't be foolish, my dear."

"I suppose that means that you will not tell me anything, but I think, Bobby," with a softly cajoling inflection, "that you might trust me. Who is she?"

There was a long pause, while the anxious look on Mrs. Ordway's face deepened.

"You really want to know?"

"Yes."

"Marian Stanhope!"

"Marian!" Mrs. Ordway's face cleared as if by magic. And she had been imagining all sorts of disgraceful entanglements! She should have known Rob better.

"I am perfectly delighted, dear," she said warmly; "I don't understand you in the least, though. How do you expect to overtake Marian in your yacht, when she is flying across Asia by rail with the Lewises, and if——"

"She is not with the Lewises, Lucia."

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"She sailed from San Francisco with them; they were——"

Winthrop dropped into a chair beside his sister and leaned forward, his chin on his folded hands, his eyes on the far-off skyline.

"That was the plan, straight enough, dear, and I thought at the time that it was not half bad. It might give her time to get the proper perspective of things. You see, she came out of college with all sorts of high ideals—and two years in our set have been—well, rather disillusionizing."

Mrs. Ordway drew back indignantly. "I really think, Rob——"

"No sense in getting angry, my dear. You and Fred have managed to keep decent and haven't found affinities elsewhere. But you are the shining exception. Mrs. Layton finds Kirkbridge wherever she goes. Every one connives at it. A hostess wouldn't dream of inviting one without the other. Then there's Raymond's wife, and——"

"I know, Bobby; it is too horribly true. But what has it all to do with Marian?"

"A lot, unfortunately. She grew more disgusted and intolerant every day. Lost faith, you know, in everything and in every one. But the thing that dashed all my hopes was the Mayhew affair. We had always supposed the Frank Mayhews a little better than any one else—a sort of oasis in the social desert. So when Alice Mayhew ran off with that chauffeur——"

"It was unspeakable! And there were two of the sweetest children! What could have possessed her?"

"I give it up," Winthrop replied moodily; "the whole thing is beyond my comprehension. I had had hopes of winning Marian up to that time. I was ready to do anything she wished—go into settlement work or take up any other scheme. I talked my best, Lucia,

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and my best isn't so very bad. It really meant life or death to me in a certain sense——"

"And she wouldn't listen?" Lucia Ordway's voice was wrathful. "She needn't have been so unjust! Couldn't she see that you were different——"

"I really can't blame her. She had almost consented to an engagement when the Mayhew affair occurred. Marian was so horrified and sickened that she never wanted to see New York again. The Lewises were going abroad for an indefinite time, and on the spur of the moment she joined them."

"And you couldn't dissuade her?"

"I didn't try very hard. In fact, it seemed to me about the best thing she could do. Over there things would readjust themselves. She would get her mental equilibrium again, and come to see that there were some fairly decent people in New York, after all. By and by I meant to join them. Lewis and his wife knew the whole story—they were to tell me when to turn up. There would be hundreds of chances for a fellow off there—everything would be unconventional and romantic—no hothouse atmosphere, you know, to rouse Marian's antagonism."

"Well!" in her excitement Mrs. Ordway leaned forward and seized her brother's arm; "the plan was good, Rob! Did you get impatient?"

"I was impatient, of course, for there was no engagement—Marian wouldn't listen to any sort of an understanding. But that was not the point. I could have waited. I had too much at stake to risk anything by undue haste. But when they reached Japan, Dr. Stanhope came up from Nafeka——"

"He's that missionary?"

"Exactly. By some cursed streak of ill-luck he had chanced to receive Marian's letter asking him to meet her in Japan. Well, don't you see? Here was her

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uncle brimming over with enthusiasm about his work among those dirty, filthy, treacherous islanders, and here was Marian, disgusted with our modern civilization—longing for a simple life and real work—you can guess what happened."

"Rob! you don't mean that she——"

"That's just what I do mean," Winthrop said grimly. "She left the Lewises—they couldn't very well hold her by main force—and she went with her uncle to that vile hole which ought to be blotted from the face of the earth. Lewis let me know at once, and I started off. I asked the Wardwells to come, because Dick can talk so many of those South Pacific lingoos." There was a strained, weary look on Winthrop's face which touched his sister.

"My poor, dear boy!" she said warmly; "the whole affair is outrageous. Couldn't Marian see that you were clean and wholesome and decent?"

"She had had some rather hard jolts," Winthrop returned quietly. "She left college with faith in every one. That first year Turner ran off with an actress. He hadn't been married two years, either. The Hawthorne scandal followed on top of that. One thing after another cropped up, and at last Marian was ready to cut us all."

"She should have had more sense. I—I wish that you had told me before. Perhaps I could have helped a little."

"I think not; but perhaps you can be some comfort to her now—if—if things turn out all right."

"Are we actually headed for Nafeka, Bobby? Do you mean to kidnap her?"

"I shall not bring her away unless she is perfectly willing to come, but neither shall I come without her if I stay there for the rest of my life."

"Dear boy, don't you know that you are injuring

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your chances now? Let Marian have a year on her island; then go for her."

"Good God, Lucia! you don't realize what you are saying! She may be dead now, as we talk of her. Those natives are the lowest, foulest beings that the Almighty ever put breath into. I daren't sleep any more—I have such horrible dreams. I see her——" He stopped abruptly. His forehead was covered with big drops of moisture and his lips closed in a hard, tense line.

Lucia's eyes filled with sudden, scorching tears. "I could not understand before, dear, why you looked so worn and thin. I am sorry, so sorry about it all, Rob! but aren't you needlessly anxious? Dr. Stanhope has lived among the creatures for fifteen years. They have never harmed him. He must have a tremendous influence——"

"The situation has changed radically, Lucia, within the last few weeks. One of the largest commercial houses in London has had a sort of substation on Nafeka. Half a dozen Englishmen were there all the time gathering in stuff from the adjacent islands. Their boats touched there at least once a month. Now the firm has abandoned that station. Got a new one farther south."

"Yes?"

"Wilson—he's the Eastern manager for the concern—tried to make Stanhope leave when the station was shifted. He told him the facts in the baldest English, and what he knew was enough to curdle your blood. Stanhope was not the first missionary to locate at Nafeka. Others had tried it before Wilson established a station there. They all met with 'accidents.' Wilson wormed the truth out of one of the natives. Those men had been boiled alive, hacked to pieces, fed to the sharks! All that had saved Stanhope was the presence

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of that handful of Englishmen with their generous supply of ammunition. But Stanhope wouldn't listen. He talked a lot of rot about his 'children,' and their trust in him." Winthrop clenched his teeth. "The man is a blatant imbecile!"

"But, Rob, surely, you believe that he is doing a grand work?"

"See here, Lucia, the Almighty gave us judgment and common sense. I take it that he meant us to use them. I believe in Christianity with all my heart. It is the fundamental thing which makes life worth the living. But you might as well talk Hebrew to those wretches as they are to-day, as try to teach them the principles of our religion. They don't know what truth, morality, and honesty mean. You can't hammer those ideas into their brains. They are a hundred times more brutish and beastly than my horse. You've got to begin at the base of things, I tell you; and unless you've a warship back of you and a consul near by with plenty of sand——"

"Don't you believe in missionary work at all?" his sister gasped.

"I don't believe in trying to put up a tower before you've laid the foundations of the building. And aren't we told not to cast pearls before swine? My metaphors may be mixed, but my ideas aren't. I know what I think about this whole matter. Last Fall Marian and I were doing a little quiet slumming. We ran across Kate Northrup; she's a College Settlement woman—rich, you know, and I always supposed her bright——"

"Why, of course she's bright, Bobby. She's the smartest girl I know."

Winthrop shrugged his shoulders. "Then the intelligence of your friends must be far below normal. The day we saw Miss Northrup she was lecturing the wom-

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en in one of the tenements on cleanliness. They must bathe daily. They must see that each child took a daily bath. They must use plenty of water in washing the dishes and in scrubbing the floors——”

“Why, of course, Rob! The poor can at least be clean. I should have said exactly what she did.”

“Should you? She was there and knew the conditions. Now listen. Some of those women lived up four and five and even six flights of narrow, rickety stairs. The only water for the entire tenement came from a hydrant in the yard that gave out a miserable, weakly flow. Now be honest, Lucia! How many pails of water would you have carried up six flights of stairs? Would you have had either the time or the strength to carry out Miss Northrup’s injunctions?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Mrs. Ordway confessed frankly; “but I didn’t suppose that there were any such tenements any more——”

“Hundreds and hundreds of them.”

“It is awful, Rob, to have people herded that way. No wonder they become criminals!”

“We practically force them into crime by not allowing them to live like decent human beings. Kate Northrup has plenty of money. I told her to use some of it in practical philanthropy. Let her build some decent tenements. Have water on each floor; plenty of light; some modern ventilating shafts; a little cheap wall paper; a few civilized conveniences in the kitchen. Then if she wants to talk cleanliness she can—only she will not need to do it then. You can’t ignore conditions and surroundings, Lucia. ’Tis a wonder that some of those women don’t throw their visitors out when they talk such rot as Kate Northrup and her ilk do.”

“I see, but—just what has that to do with Nafeka?”

“It seems to me that the one place where people

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think that judgment and common sense are not needed in matters of religion. I don't think Christ taught any such doctrine, though. Just as you needn't preach cleanliness to those tenement creatures until you give them the proper facilities for keeping clean, so, I say, there is no use in preaching the Gospel of Holiness and Purity to brutes until you have the power of making them realize what holiness and purity are."

"But Bobby——"

"Of course, if you have a battleship within hailing distance, or a garrison of soldiers at your command, you can go to work on the children and in the course of several generations you may make some faint impression. I'll tell you honestly that I don't believe there are many tribes outside of interior Africa as degraded as these Nafekians. Stanhope is casting pearls before swine. They don't comprehend the A B C of his teachings. He thinks that he has made converts, but he hasn't one who really grasps the simplest truths that he has spent his best years trying to teach them. At home, among our foreigners, he could have been a power for good——"

"Rob, you are awfully unorthodox, and—and what you say seems positively sacrilegious."

"Does it? I am sorry, but I am sure that I am right. My dog, there, has more intelligence, more loyalty, more 'soul,' if you choose to put it so, than those wretches. The General would die for me at need without a whimper, wouldn't you, old fellow?" Winthrop looked steadily into the eyes of a huge St. Bernard, which had roused at the mention of his name; "it is a beastly shame, Lucia, even to mention the General in the same breath with these creatures. You cannot teach them honor or nobility or manhood or any of the fundamental essentials of religion and civilization. They are so unspeakably vile that Wilson couldn't find

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adequate words to describe them. And Marian is at their mercy now!—I can't think of anything else day or night, and——”

“But, Rob, they will not dare——”

“Oh, they'll dare fast enough, only they'll wait a bit so as to have the matter appear accidental. They've learned diplomacy if they haven't learned decency. Nafeka belongs to England, you know, and before Wilson left he hammered a few cold facts into the head of the native ruler. He thought a lot of Stanhope and he was sick at the thought of leaving him there. He tried to imbue the beasts with an idea of Stanhope's importance at home. He vowed to bring pestilences and curses upon them all if anything happened to Stanhope——”

“And you think——?”

“That Wilson's threats will make them behave for a while. 'Twon't last, and he knew it. I have been crowding steam hoping that we may get there in time—but the awful dread is making me old——”

He rose abruptly and walked to the farther end of the yacht. Mrs. Ordway's eyes followed him wistfully. It hurt her to see Rob suffer.

II

When the *Esmeralda* finally steamed into the wonderful natural harbor of Nafeka, there were some on board who saw no charm in its tropical, scintillating beauty. Despite the warmth of the climate, Lucia Ordway shivered as she glanced at the opalescent sands, the vivid, intense greens of the foliage, and the low-browed, thick-lipped natives, stretched lazily in front of their huts.

Her lips were pale and her eyes roamed restlessly

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up and down the island. Perhaps they were too late! Then a stifled cry from Winthrop—the flash of a white dress among the palm leaves—and Marian was waving her hand to them!

Hours later Winthrop had a chance for a quiet talk with her. Stanhope was giving the rest some enthusiastic details of his work. He was boyishly energetic and trustful. Marian sighed as his voice drifted to their ears.

"Uncle has such faith in those wretches. He never sees their covert looks. To me every glance seems a threat—I live in mortal terror——"

Winthrop's hand closed firmly over hers. "I shall not leave you here, dear; don't you know that? If you will not go home with me, I shall stay here at Nafeka with you. I cannot endure such an agony of dread again. Dearest, how could you torture me so?"

"I didn't understand, Rob; I knew—nothing. Uncle had been here for years. He loved the creatures—and—and—he told me about his work. It seemed the noblest thing that I could do."

"Dear, look at me! I must know where I stand with you. When you left New York you had no faith in me. Has Nafeka taught you any trust, sweetheart? Could you——?"

"Nafeka—or something else—has taught me, Rob, that I always did have faith in you, though I may not have realized it. But—but——"

"Thank God for that, dearest. Why, Marian——"

"Wait a moment, Rob. I want to go away with you; to forget this hideous experience; I want to be sane and frivolous and safe—safe! once more——"

"You shall do exactly that, dear heart."

"I can't. I simply can't. I am no protection, of course, to uncle, but it would be such heinous coward-

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liness to go off and leave him alone. I feel instinctively that some plot is on foot——”

“I haven’t a doubt of it, dear girl, but I have been through too much to be daunted by a trifle like that. I know some arguments that will move your uncle. I’ll make him leave Nafeka! Trust me for that, Marian! But never mind Dr. Stanhope now. This is my hour. I have lived all of my life just for this. I am going to recite Mrs. Browning’s Portuguese Sonnets to you. I am going——”

His voice trailed off into silence as Marian looked into his face—lips tremulous, eyes aflame.

At the dinner-table, hours later, Winthrop bethought himself of the next important move in his game.

“I presume that I ought to pay my respects to the Chief Mogul here, Dr. Stanhope. Where is His Royal Highness’s dirty hut?”

“Don’t go to-day, Mr. Winthrop,” the missionary begged hesitatingly; “the—the natives are not just themselves at present——”

“You mean——?” Winthrop’s voice was imperative.

“They make a sort of wine here several times a year. I—I—have not been able to break them of the pernicious habit. It—it distresses me greatly. But they made some yesterday—and had a feast in the evening, and——”

“And they are drunk at present, I conclude—the whole bunch of them.”

“That’s about it, I am sorry to say, but we, with our advantages of the most advanced civilization, are hardly in a position to cast many stones at them.”

“Possibly not. However, I am sorry that I must defer my interview. I wished to see the dusky king as soon as possible. Wardwell was going to act as my interpreter.”

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"To-morrow, probably——"

"Yes. I'll see him to-morrow. I think that I'll have Captain Maxwell get out our Fourth of July cannon and all our flags; we'll give him a vociferous greeting."

Dr. Stanhope looked rather uncertainly across the table at his athletic young host. "From your tone, Mr. Winthrop, I infer that you have not much sympathy with my work."

"I have the greatest respect possible for you, Dr. Stanhope, but not one vestige for these natives, and so—perhaps we had better discuss that to-morrow."

"Or later still. I take it from what your friends have said that you will be at Nafeka for some days. That being the case, I can take command of a little expedition to the islands south of here."

Winthrop sat up alertly. "Do you mind explaining more fully?"

"The king is sending several of his chief men on a sort of royal embassy to some of the neighboring tribes. He asked me to take charge of them, but I did not like to leave Marian——"

"I did not want him to go," Marian interjected in a low tone; "but I was quite as much afraid for him as for myself. I—I have a revolver—that Mr. Lewis made me take. Don't look so horrified, dear."

"I can't look any other way when I remember in what awful peril you have been living. I shall never be able to forget it as long as I live."

"I'll make you forget it!" she said softly. "It is all over now—and you are here, Rob. I am glad, glad—glad! You are so big and strong and confident and sure!"

"That sounds good to a fellow who has been homesick for you for months and months." Winthrop was smiling at her. "Don't worry now. I flatter myself

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that after I have had an interview with this beast of a king he will not consider it healthy to interfere with Dr. Stanhope. I wish I could see him to-day."

"No use trying, Rob. Ohorti—that's the king—and his special friend will be too drunk to see you until nearly noon to-morrow. The rest are not quite so bad——"

"Is drunkenness a royal prerogative?" Winthrop asked lightly. It seemed to him at that moment that life had little more to offer him. The world was his, for the world was—Love! "Well, that is true, dear, in some countries supposed to be civilized. Never mind old Ohorti now. Promise me to stay on board the yacht to-night. You are safe enough as long as we are here, but I shall feel better——"

"I'll stay," Marian interrupted swiftly. "Dear boy, Lucia told me what a nightmare of horror you have been living in—I am not worth it at all. If I had not been so conceited, so arrogant——"

"You had better not say very much more," Winthrop interposed, "unless you want me to kiss you before them all. I am not strong enough to resist temptation just now——"

With the strain removed from his mind Winthrop slept that night as he had not done for months. Marian was safe and in some way he would induce her uncle to move to a safer station of missionary work. Life was a grand, a glorious thing!

He was still sleeping soundly the next morning when Wardwell roused him. "Awfully sorry to disturb you, old man, but I didn't dare wait. Here is a note to you from Dr. Stanhope. He has gone off with that expedition, and——"

Winthrop was out of bed, alert and stern. "Give me that note. Now have Maxwell get out our toy cannon

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and fire it off until the men are tired. Send one of the natives up for Ohorti and his chiefs—tell the old fellow to get here as fast as he can move, if he doesn't want his island blown to pieces."

"I thought that you were going to him——"

"Not now," grimly; "everything is changed. Hurry, Dick, that's a good fellow. Try and get Ohorti here by the time I'm on deck."

And Ohorti appeared—dazed, ugly, sullen, and reticent, but perfectly sober. Much seemed to have happened since he had gotten so gloriously drunk the day before. This strange boat had come with all the foreign people and the roar of cannon. He had thought himself freed from all such espionage with the departure of the cursed Englishmen.

The royal brow was corrugated by deeper frowns than usual. His men had started off on their expedition before he awoke—and the white missionary had accompanied them. Yesterday he had considered himself a master of diplomacy; to-day he was not so sure of it. In fact, he scented trouble for himself, and a few words from Wardwell strengthened his premonitions.

"Tell him, Dick," Winthrop commanded, "that we are going to follow Dr. Stanhope at once. Let him give you the directions, and if he foists any lies—he'll find out a few things that Americans can do. Tell him that if a single hair of Stanhope's head is hurt, I'll put him in irons and take him to the English consul. He shall die as sure as there's a God in heaven! Pound that into his brain, Dick, good and strong."

He stood back while the conversation was carried on. He fancied that he detected deadly fear in Ohorti's bearing—and yet perhaps there was nothing wrong! He was growing as nervous as a woman.

Wardwell turned to him at last. "He has told me

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where his boat is headed, and I imagine that he is speaking the truth. I rather think that he is as anxious for us to overtake Stanhope as you are—I don't just understand."

"I do," Winthrop said shortly. "Some infernal devilry is up. They have planned some convenient accident! Give Maxwell orders, and then tell that beast that we are coming back to reckon with him. If there are any debts to pay, I shall pay them in full—you tell him so in the native lingo—and put it strong, Dick—strong as——"

"Yes, old fellow; but don't begin to worry needlessly. It will turn out all right."

Would it? That was the question which Winthrop asked himself ceaselessly throughout the long day. Ohorti's cringing, abject terror seemed to give the lie to Wardwell's hopeful prophecy.

For Marian's sake, he hid his dread and made light of her terrors. The day was nearly over and yet there was no sign of Stanhope and the Nafekians. Had Ohorti dared to lie about the direction which his men would take?

The gorgeous glory of the tropical evening would soon be over. Winthrop grew silent and harassed. If they did not sight the boat within an hour——

He swept the water with his glasses once again, slowly, carefully, deliberately. An incredulous exclamation was smothered on his lips. A moment later he had swept Marian into his arms and borne her downstairs.

"Keep her here, girls—don't any of you come up for a while—we shall have some work to do——" His lips were absolutely colorless; despite his efforts his voice shook.

He was on deck again before the amazed women could offer any protest.

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"You—you saw it, Dick?"

Wardwell nodded. Words were impossible just then.

"And this morning——" Winthrop groaned, "he was alive—one of us—and now—— The fiendish cruelty of it all! They'll pay for it! They'll pay for it dearly!" He was straining his eyes, staring at a misshapen object in the bow of a small boat.

III

Marian had been married for almost a year. There had been a terrible illness. Winthrop feared at times that Fate was jesting with him—showing him the glory and beauty that life might hold, only to dash the cup of promise from his lips at last.

But slowly, very slowly, Marian turned her face again toward life and love. Nafeka and everything connected with it were tabooed subjects.

Winthrop wondered sometimes if this were the best course to pursue, but the doctor's injunctions had been stringent.

This evening she broke the silence herself.

"Rob, did—did you read the papers carefully to-day?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"You saw——"

"I saw the dispatch from London, if that is what you mean?"

"Yes, dear. Do you know, Bob, it takes the sting out of uncle's death for me? Before it had all seemed so useless, so unnecessary. A grand life was thrown away—and what was accomplished?"

"Humanly speaking—nothing," Winthrop said slowly. "He had not reached a single soul for permanent good. He had failed simply because circum-

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stances and environment made success an impossibility."

"But his death has accomplished what his life did not. The dispatch said that the story of his life had created an immense impression."

"Yes. Wilson is going to re-establish his station at Nafeka on a stronger basis, and a group of energetic young men are going out to develop the island and—to teach the natives. It will inaugurate a new era for Nafeka."

"It is what uncle would have wished—he would have been satisfied with his part in bringing about such a result. Don't—don't be afraid to talk to me any more of Nafeka—and of uncle—I want to talk of him sometimes."

"I understand, dearest. And perhaps he was more nearly right than I in the estimate of values. There is one thing beyond the reach of ordinary logic, and that is—Love."

**WHEN THREE HUNDRED MAIDENS
SWAM THE TIBER**

WHEN THREE HUNDRED MAIDENS SWAM THE TIBER

For many centuries there stood in Rome, at the very head of the Via Sacra, an equestrian statue of a woman. Now, even in these progressive days of woman's clubs and woman's suffrage, such a statue is an uncommon sight, and the fact that one was erected in Rome five centuries before the Christian era, and in the place, too, of supreme honor, proves that the Roman maiden possessed no ordinary mind or ordinary valor.

In truth, Cloelia would have left the imprint of her individuality on any nation, and on any age. Had she lived in these modern times, she would have been a tremendous power. Even in Rome, hampered as she was by the customs of the times, she was a potent influence. Beautiful beyond dispute, belonging to a patrician family, although not to a wealthy one, she was the ruling spirit in her own particular circle.

Roman maidens commenced their education at a very early age, and from the time when her long-suffering nurse took her daily to the tabernæ for instruction, Cloelia dominated all of her associates. Her life was happy and serene.

Rome had been declared a republic, and the government was yet mild and beneficent. To be sure, there were occasional attacks made upon the city by surrounding nations; still, secure in the strength of Rome's seven hills, and full of justifiable pride in

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Rome's soldiers, the women of Rome felt few tremors of fear.

Cloelia had just reached young womanhood and had left the tabernæ, when Lars Porsena suddenly took up the cause of the exiled king, and marched against Rome with none of the modern preliminaries of warfare. In those days, there was no formal declaration of war; a nation often knew nothing of the foe plotting against it, until an army encamped at its very gates.

The Romans were unprepared, although they had called their citizens in from the fields and had stationed guards at every exposed point. Every school child remembers how the Janiculum was taken by a furious assault of the enemy, and how the Sublician bridge, being very insecurely guarded, offered Lars Porsena an easy means of access to the city.

When the guards were deserting their posts and were fleeing to the Palatium and Capitol, the frenzied eloquence of Horatius Cocles halted two of the recreants, and, with Spurius Lartius and Titus Herminius, he held the foe at bay while his comrades behind him followed his instructions and cut down the bridge.

The banks of the Tiber were crowded with Romans while the dauntless three held the host of the enemy in check. As the last timber was falling, Lartius and Herminius turned in obedience to the call of their friends and rushed back to safety over the shaking timbers. Horatius, fighting with one of Lars Porsena's captains, could not obey the call, and all Rome held its breath while he made his daring leap into the Tiber and swam back to home and country.

Hundreds of hands were outstretched to help him. As he climbed the bank amid the acclaims of thousands, his eyes and Cloelia's met. They had known each other from childhood, but that one instant count-

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ed for more than all of the years which had gone before. Soul met soul, claiming and answering each other.

No word was spoken, but Cloelia knew well that when the enemy was driven away and Rome was free once more Horatius Cocles would seek her as his wife. While an enemy remained near Rome, he would be a soldier; his duty would lie in the field; there would be no time for love or dalliance.

Despite Rome's strength, Lars Porsena's position was most threatening. He had encompassed the city; it seemed almost as if he would be able to starve them into compliance with his demands. The people met daily in the forum, men and women; there was no business transacted in the market places. There was but one thought in all Rome. When would the enemy retreat?

Cloelia standing impatiently in the forum some weeks after the brave deed of Horatius, voiced her indignation and restlessness in hot terms.

"Why do we stay shut up in this place like dogs in a kennel? Are our men afraid to go forth and fight?"

"How can we go forth?" It was the voice of Horatius demanding an answer; Cloelia had not known that he was near her, though in good sooth he was seldom far away in those perilous times. "We are not cowards. What man may dare, we will dare; but if we sally forth now, we go forth to certain defeat. Do you know what that means?"

"No," Cloelia faltered; "what does it mean?"

"It means that the insolent Tarquins will be placed once more upon the throne of Rome; that we soldiers will be butchered,—that our women will be sold into slavery,—that is but a part of what it means. Now do you still bid us go forth?"

"What can we gain by waiting?"

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"Perhaps nothing, perhaps much. The gods may come to our assistance. They have done so ere now, and have wrested victory for us from almost certain defeat. Lars Porsena is a more subtle enemy than we have ever met before. See where he lies encamped; he holds the hills. If we go forth to meet him, his arrows will fall upon us in the valley like the snow-flakes of Northern Europe—we should never be able to ascend the hill."

"Then the outlook is really hopeless?" A little dismay appeared in the maiden's tone. If Horatius deemed their case desperate, it was desperate indeed. He had proved his valor too thoroughly for any one to dare question it.

"I do not call it quite hopeless," he said, in a low tone. "If we are almost starving, so also are the soldiers of Lars Porsena. Our people brought in their grain from the fields; he can find nothing, and his army must be fed. He will soon propose terms."

"Truly?"

"Truly—Cloelia—see! Look!" he burst forth, in sudden excitement. "There comes a legate, an ambassador! Now we shall soon hear what he has to say to us. The Sentaors are going forth to meet him. I must go, too; but"—and he raised his voice until it reached the outermost edge of the surging throng—"we shall accept no terms from Lars Porsena that includes the restoring of the Tarquins to the throne."

"Never, though we starve like rats in a hole!" the crowd yelled.

Horatius smiled, satisfied. What the terms might be he had no idea, but he wished to feel sure of the temper of the people.

Into the Senate house went the ambassador and the stately Senators. Outside the closed doors the people murmured and roared impatiently. Their lives were

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at stake; they had a right to know what demands had been made. The murmur of their voices, louder and ever louder, reached the ears of the Senators. There was justice in what they said, and at length the massive Senate doors swung open, and Turtius, one of the oldest Senators, came forth to address them.

"Lars Porsena proposes peace with us,—his terms are satisfactory,—but there is much to be arranged. He withdraws his demand for the restoration of the Tarquins"—a mighty shout of joy went forth from the crowd—"but there are items relative to our boundaries and our trade which must be discussed at length,—and——" He paused gravely. The people leaned forward breathlessly; something of grave import was coming, they knew intuitively. "As a pledge of our good faith, he demands hostages, which shall be held by him until the final agreements are duly signed. He wishes"—the voice of the speaker grew graver and more solemn—"three hundred of our young women as hostages, one hundred boys, and one hundred of our young men. People of Rome—shall we send them?"

There was no answer. From the joy of deliverance the Romans were cast into an abyss of doubt and gloom. It was customary, indeed, to demand hostages,—but not young women; their boys they were willing to send, but—their maidens? They knew well the men who composed the army of Lars Porsena,—riotous, reckless, immoral, and vicious. Rome's maidens were pure. Dared they send their girls into such vile custody?"

"What if we refuse?" A plebeian, old and bent, voiced the thought in every heart.

"If we refuse," Turtius replied, "Lars Porsena swears by all of his gods to starve us to death and to restore the Tarquins to the throne. What is your will? What reply shall I send to Lars Porsena?"

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The minutes passed slowly. Who would dare to answer such a question? The Romans held their women in greatest reverence and honor; they would defend a woman's honor with their last breath; how, then, could they send the maidens into this danger,—a danger which might prove worse than death?

"Turtius!" the voice of Cloelia rang forth. "I will go as one hostage." There was a tinge of solemnity in her voice; she knew well what she was doing,—it was more than even Horatius had dared.

He grew pale and trembled at her words. Even to save Rome he would not let her go. But, accustomed for years to go where Cloelia led the way, one maiden and then another took up the word,—the quota was full in a brief space, and Turtius, almost against his will, sent back the ambassador to Lars Porsena with the tidings that his demands had been accepted, and that the hostages would go to his camp the next morning.

"Why did you do that?" Horatius said, in a low tone of reproach to Cloelia. "Rome had better fall than have her women and her maidens disgraced."

"If Rome should fall, what mercy would we meet at the hands of our captors? This is our only chance. As hostages, surely we shall be treated with the respect due us; as prisoners and slaves, what could we hope?"

"You may be right, but even the sacred name of hostage is oft times abused among barbarous nations. You were brave, Cloelia, and may the gods preserve and keep you! I must be near, though I have no opportunity to speak to you in the camp of Lars Porsena and no opportunity to aid you. Still, I must go. I shall offer myself as a hostage."

"No!" Cloelia cried sharply; "I will not have it so." But her protest was unavailing.

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The next morning, amid the uncontrolled grief of the Romans, the three hundred maidens marched slowly through the northern gate of the city, on into the camp of Rome's foe. Their heads were veiled and bowed; no word was spoken; there was no smile on any lip; they knew what they were daring. Behind them walked one hundred boys, and behind the boys were one hundred young men,—the flower of Rome, headed by Horatius Cocles.

There was a boisterous tumult in the camp when the hostages arrived, and Cloelia's heart grew even fainter with dread. Yet, would any nation dare to violate its honor and insult a hostage?

The days passed on. The Romans worked feverishly to complete the negotiations and thus secure the return of their youths and maidens. Yet, despite all of their haste, many things occurred to delay them.

So far as mere physical comforts were concerned, the maidens did not suffer, but the unconcealed admiration of Porsena's lawless officers, the drunken compliments which were bestowed so freely, all of these things and many more of a like nature filled them with alarm, and each day matters grew worse and worse.

Cloelia felt almost desperate. What fate was impending over them? These maidens had come at her bidding. They should not regret it,—they should not!

Alert and watchful, Cloelia's heart was encouraged by a message which Horatius had bribed a soldier to deliver. In two days they would be sent back to Rome, the negotiations would be completed, and Lars Porsena would withdraw his army.

Cloelia breathed a prayer of deepest gratitude to the gods! For three long weeks and more she had borne a deadly strain,—she felt that she could not endure much more.

That night, for the first time since she had gone forth

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from Rome, she slept soundly,—a sleep of utter fatigue and exhaustion. She was awakened by a whisper in her ear,—a voice was calling her, hurriedly and imploringly.

"Cloelia,—oh, Cloelia, can you do nothing? nothing? We followed you,—can you not save us?"

"What do you mean, Mucia? Speak instantly!"

"I overheard the guards talking. The officers know that soon we shall be sent home,—they are in their own tents now, drinking,—but they are coming here—here,—Cloelia,—and they have sworn—have sworn——"

Cloelia was on her feet, speaking rapidly, swiftly. "Rouse the rest! The night is dark,—the guards are half-asleep around our tents. Let them all slip out underneath the folds of the canvas, down to the banks of the Tiber."

"What—what are you going to do?"

"We shall swim across to home and to our protectors. Don't stop! Obey!" And, carried away by Cloelia's irresistible will and forceful purpose, her friend obeyed. In a marvelously short space of time, the maidens, every one, had assembled on the bank of the yellow Tiber. So cautiously had they stolen away that their flight was not discovered.

There had been no stringent guard placed before their tents. Why should there be? The maids were there as hostages, not as prisoners, and though the path leading back to Rome was strongly sentineled, there was no need to surround the tents with soldiers. The maidens could not return home,—that retreat was rendered impossible, and of course they would not wish to penetrate farther into the enemy's country.

But Lars Porsena did not guard the Tiber, and the Roman maidens were quite as expert as their brothers in the swimming pools of the *tabernæ*. But would her friends dare to follow her in the dark, in the mad ven-

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ture that she was about to make? Cloelia caught her breath sharply. They must go,—even the timid ones would surely prefer death in the Tiber to dishonor in Porsena's camp.

Once again Rome was roused and agitated. The populace poured to the forum in the early morning, for the news of the maidens' adventure had penetrated to every quarter.

"Cloelia!" was the cry. "Cloelia, tell us the story! Tell us all! We shall avenge you."

"There is nothing to be avenged," she replied, in clear, ringing tones. "We are all here, we are safe, but why we came I will tell you." And rapidly she told of all of the occurrences of the preceding night.

"You shall judge us," she concluded proudly. "Did I do right?"

"Yes, yes," the people shrieked.

Turtius came forward, grave and troubled.

"Cloelia, you have been brave and noble, you have saved our women from dishonor, our homes from stain; no man in all Rome ever performed a more courageous deed, but——"

"But?"

"But you were hostages, and at dawn some demand will surely come from Lars Porsena. He will demand that you all return. Romans, what shall we say when the messenger comes?"

"They shall not go back—they shall never go back," the people shrieked with one accord.

Turtius bowed. "You must redeem that pledge, then, Romans, though it be in blood and tears."

Turtius was not wrong; the sun had barely flooded the earth with its all-embracing glory when Porsena's courier appeared.

Turtius led him to the Forum. "Speak to the people

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yourself, and let them know from your own lips what your king demands."

The courier bowed in mock-reverence. "This, O Romans, says Lars Porsena: Your maidens have violated every sacred pledge of a hostage—they have returned stealthily to your boundaries; they have broken plighted faith—nay, hear me out——" as the people broke forth into angry cries; "Porsena says that the maid, Cloelia, hath performed a braver deed than Mucius Scævola or Horatius Cocles,—in recognition of her bravery, he will allow the other maidens to remain in Rome,—he cares nothing for them. They may abide here; she must return at once with me, else all of his treaty with you will be as naught. He will level your city in the dust, and he will kill you like dogs. Those are his words."

"Words cost little—they are cheap," Turtius said sternly; "he will find it no simple task to destroy this city or to conquer Romans."

The ambassador shrugged his shoulders. "Do you refuse his terms, then?"

"We refuse, we refuse,—go back and tell him so," cried the mass of indignant people around the speaker.

"No," Cloelia threw back her head; "your maidens went into danger because they followed my example. —I have brought them back to you—they are safe—safe. But I—I shall—I shall return."

There were arms around her—her parents' arms, there were voices pleading and expostulating—but Cloelia put them all aside. Coldly, sternly, she turned away from her people.

"There is something to be done for my country, and I must do it. A woman may not shirk her duty more than a youth."

And so she returned to the camp of Lars Porsena.

She was brought before the king, and, in utter si-

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lence, she heard his bitter arraignment—his reiterated assertion that she had broken faith—had violated her pledge as a hostage. "And now," he concluded harshly, "your people have sent you back——"

"Your pardon, oh, king, but my people did not send me back—I came against their will and wish. Romans," she said proudly, "do not send their maidens into danger."

"You came—voluntarily?" the king spoke incredulously, but one look into her proud, truthful eyes convinced him that she spoke no falsehood.

He remained silent for some time—perhaps he was envying Rome her breed of noble hearts. His voice was softer when next he spoke. "Lars Porsena knows bravery when he sees it. You may go back to Rome to-day in safety. Furthermore, you may take half of the youths whom I have as hostages. The other hundred shall accompany me to the gates of my own city so that no ally of Rome attack me on the homeward march. I shall take those hundred youths as a surety for my safe return home. Go and choose whom you will!"

Elated, overjoyed with a relief too profound for outward expression, Cloelia, like one in a dream, moved toward the tents of the other hostages. One thought was uppermost in her mind. She could release Horatius. She was free—and she would set him at liberty, also.

The story of Cloelia's exploit had spread throughout the length and breadth of the army—there was no soldier or hostage in ignorance of it—Cloelia's eyes fell as she met those of Horatius, full of unutterable pride and love.

Porsena's captain briefly recounted to the youths the promise of Lars Porsena, and then, secretly out of patience that his king had spoiled good sport for the

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officers,—by leaving the maidens in Rome,—he ordered Cloelia to make her choice speedily.

She turned swiftly to Horatius—he should be the first, of course. As once before his eyes spoke to her, and she read his soul without a spoken word. She must not choose him—he would not have it. He would not accept liberty for himself when helpless boys would be left in Lars Porsena's power.

The color faded from her cheek—the joy from her eye. She turned wearily to the captain. "Give me the youngest boys, the hundred who are least in years."

Again the eyes of Horatius met and thanked her, but she had no answering smile for him. To be sure, he was a hostage,—not a prisoner,—but who knew what might befall him ere he was set at liberty again? The Tarquins might raise a mob against the Roman hostages and bribe the people to slay every one. Since Horatius might not share her liberty, her delight in it was gone.

It was nearly three months later that the little band of hostages, weary, and greatly diminished in numbers, returned to Rome.

The streets were crowded; there were festal garlands on the altars of all the gods. The young men were greeted with rapturous acclaim; Rome made a glad holiday.

In the midst of the joyous, happy tumult, the glance of Horatius fell upon a group of workmen at the head of the Via Sacra. "What are those men doing?" he questioned curiously.

Cloelia's father, standing near, answered him.

"That is a statue, an equestrian statue, which the Roman Senate decreed should be erected in honor of my daughter, for her bravery it was which saved the honor of Rome's maidens and which saved Rome

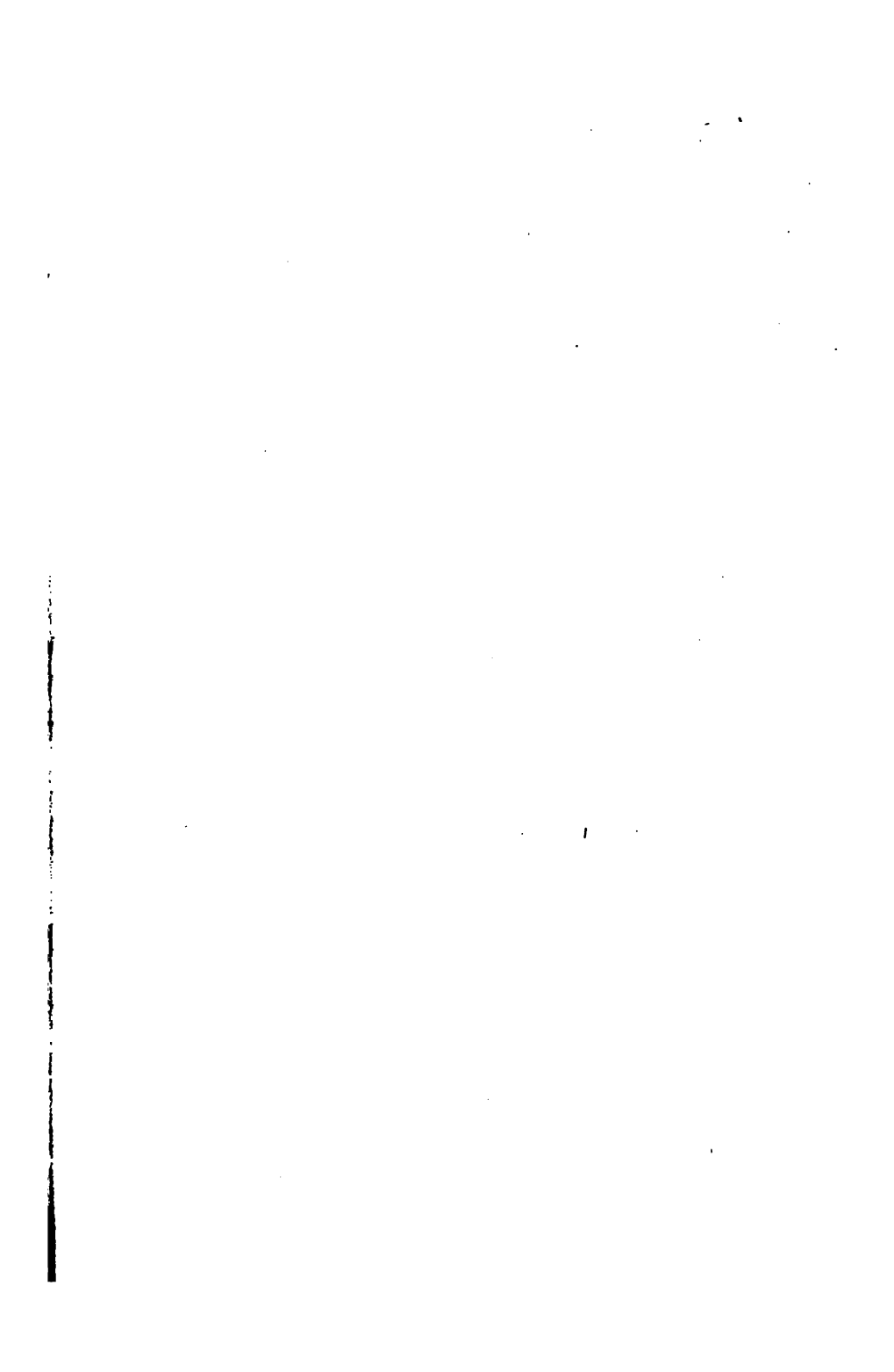
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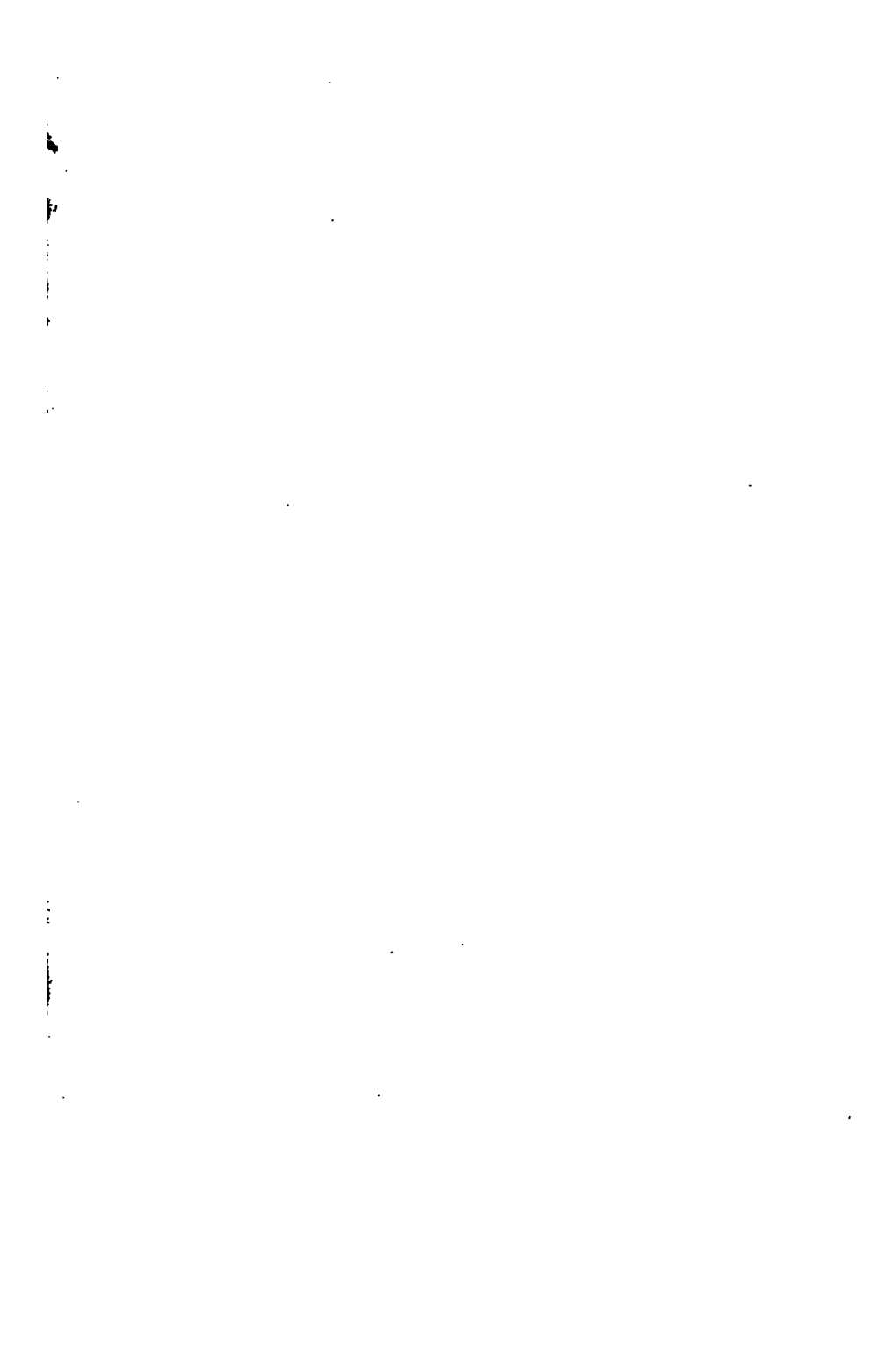
itself." The old man spoke with an air of intense pride.

A flush of pride still deeper lighted the face of Horatius, as, turning his look from the magnificent statue, he said, in a low, moved tone, "There is something which I wish to say to the father of Cloelia."

THE END







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